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MARCH 60c

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NEW Lawrence Treat
"off-trail" Agatha Christie
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NEW Anthony Gilbert
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NEW Edward D. Hoch

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complete short novel
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"It's inexplicable ... and anything inexplicable on a deathbed is sinister ..."

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ANTHONY BOUCHER'S CHOICEST

In her Editor's Note to *Boucher's Choicest*, Jeanne F. Bernkopf explains her selection of 24 stories from the six annual volumes edited by Mr. Boucher before his death in 1968. As she herself expressed it, Mrs. Bernkopf "tried to pick from each edition of *Best Detective Stories of the Year* those stories I as his (publisher's) editor knew to have been his special favorites" — stories "distinguished by his taste, imagination and delight in variety," demonstrating "not only the quality but the scope of the mystery" short story, and showing "the brilliance of a Boucher assortment . . . a sampling of his standard of excellence."

Here is how *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* fared in the two dozen stories representing Anthony Boucher's "special favorites":

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	11 choices
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The Saturday Evening Post	2
(from books)	2
MD	1
The New Yorker	1
Playboy	1
The Saint Magazine	1

Thus, 45.8% of Anthony Boucher's favorites — from all the new detective-mystery short stories published in American magazines and books from 1962 through 1967 — nearly one-half of the best new stories appeared first in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and these "choicest of the choice" did not include any of the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which are offered by EQMM each month.

"Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
is the best crime-fiction periodical ever published."

— Anthony Boucher,
The New York Times Book Review,
October 30, 1966

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

29th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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a NEW detective NOVELET by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

After too long a silence Avram Davidson has sent us —hooray!—two brand-new novelets which he wrote with EQMM especially in mind. Here is the first—a fascinating mélange of ghost writers, literary agents, editors, publishers, and assorted inhabitants of Greenwich Village—to say nothing of cops and robbers, detectives and gangsters, and a curious gentleman calling himself "Captain Marryat." It all began, this strange if not outré adventure, when a budding writer, one Abel Serles, discovered that he needed a necktie for which he could afford to pay no more than $1; and from that Stevensonian springboard blossomed a contemporary Manhattan Nights entertainment, 25 percent zany, 50 percent free-wheeling, and 100 percent delightful—or, put another way and as you would expect from Avram Davidson, a typical and atypical Davidson frolic with, as always, wonderful filigree-work and the smoothest of mortises and 'tec tenons . . .

THE CAPTAIN M. CAPER

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

ABEL SERLES HURRIED ALONG Sixth Avenue. Partly he was looking for an answer to the problem of Sally and partly he was looking for a place where he could buy a necktie for not more than a a dollar. Without realizing it in his haste, he let the necktie move into first place and then stopped thinking about Sally altogether.

Usually Abel Serles did not wear a necktie, nor did he usually wear a suitcoat.

There had once been a time when he had regularly worn both—both pressed to a fare-thee-well; but then the irresistible force met a movable object: Serles, who

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had been writing evenings and Sundays for over a year, had in one week sold not just his first story but his first three stories!—and spectacularly failed to meet the quota required of all sales personnel at Banting Brothers. It had been a case of you-can't-fire-me, I-quit—and the firm had let him have it *his* way because old Mr. J. B. Banting didn't approve of unemployment insurance, to which he, Abel Serles, would have been entitled if he'd been discharged.

Old J. B. Banting didn't approve of most of the social changes which had occurred in the U.S.A. since John Quincy Adams had died on the floor of the House with an Abolitionist petition in his pocket and what has been described as "a smile like the Peace of God" on his face.

At the present moment, however, Abel was thinking of a different kind of unemployment insurance. Either Seventh or Eighth Avenue might have been a better bet for what he was seeking—though absolutely not Fifth Avenue or any of the streets farther east—not for a dollar necktie! However, Sixth Avenue was on his way, uptown toward West 44th Street and the lobby of the Algonquin Hotel; and he scanned every store window as he zipped along, not without some rueful recollection of the drunk who searched the north side of the street for the quarter he'd dropped on the south side, because the light on the north side—

The old chestnut ceased abruptly to be applicable as he saw, between a store selling factory-rejected classical phonograph records at $1.50 each and a shop which printed "newspapers" with the customer's own name in the headline of his choice (*Manny Hits Town, Pretty Girls Leave*), a place selling just what he was looking for: NECKTIES! NECKTIES! GOING OUT OF BUSINESS! 99¢ AND UP.

The "and up" he could forego, but the sales tax would cut into his money. Somehow, Serles felt, the Algonquin was not the place where he wanted to go grubbing in his pockets for loose change. He did the grubbing right then and there, finding—thank the Lord!—enough odd pennies to cover the tax and give him four one-dollar bills back for his fiver.

"I'll take this one," he said, not quite snatching the very first cravat he saw, this first one being an imitation plaid in colors gaudy enough to cause another rising of the clans; but the first one he saw which would pass muster. The Algonquin wasn't all that particular—and Godfrey Bland wasn't particular at all. Not about neckties, at least.

"Yessir, very nice, how about some—"

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"Don't bother to wrap it up." Serles seized the tie and strode out. It was hot in the street, which was being ripped up again, and the air was thick with asphalt smells and automobile fumes. He adjusted the tie as he continued his rapid pace north. It was 4:15; Godfrey Bland always arrived at 4:00 and would have had at least two drinks by now; he would leave at 5:00 for his home in Great Shores, Long Island. It was imperative that Serles should meet him after he had somewhat unwound from a hard day at the literary agency—shouting his demands for escalator clauses and movie, TV, stage, radio, ballet, and Punch-and-Judy rights for the United Kingdom, Australasia, and Luxembourg over the transcontinental and transatlantic telephones as if trying out for the finals in a hog-calling contest—and before he started winding up again for the trip back to Great Shores, where dwelt Mrs. Godfrey Bland (who raised show collies) and where whatever he was likely to find cooking on the stove was likelier to be for the collies than for Godfrey Bland.

Yes, between 4:15 and 4:45 was the best time to be in the Algonquin lobby—if you were Abel Serles, that is, and wanting to see Godfrey Bland.

For weeks after his first and tripartite success as an author, Serles had stuck so close to his typewriter all day that when he emerged in the evenings for food and frolic, all the dry-cleaning places were closed; but such was his zeal, his pleasure, and his absorption in his new profession that it was almost a month before he had occasion to discover that they were all closed. His tie and suitcoat, which he'd donned automatically each night, were by then pretty bad. He had flung them in the closet he kept chiefly for flinging things into, kicked off his no longer glossy Thom McCanns, and—shirt-sleeved and stocking-footed—invested in the far, far less formal kind of clothes sold in little stores that never closed, the kind of clothes (he realized with exultation and a sense of infinite release) that he had always wanted to always wear.

And "*Abe!*" she had said. "*You look so* different *tonight!*"

That had been five years ago. Both suitcoat and necktie had been cleaned since then, but not frequently and not recently. Five years . . . "A lustrum!" as Frederic H. Beard would have said—and did, when opportunity offered. Old Fred Beard, muffled to the eyebrows in unshorn hair and whiskers, cosuitor (so to speak) of Sally—Old Freddie Beard, perpetual student, financing his perpetual studies by writing learned articles about the hilts,

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tangs, blades, bindings, and what-else-have-you of Japanese swords, on which he was perhaps the nation's leading authority—Old Freddie, how he would snort and how he would scorn if he knew on what purpose his former schoolmate was now hastening.

Stopping just long enough to adjust the necktie, Abel turned into West 44th Street. He hurried on, cursing the erratic memory which had allowed him to remember the necessity for a suit-coat—wrinkled though it was, it would serve—but to forget the equally necessary tie. The lapse was costing him the price of at least one drink, but that couldn't be helped: without coat and tie he could not be served in the Algonquin, and without being served in the Algonquin he could not hope successfully to talk business with Godfrey Bland.

Thirty years past, the Algonquin had been the height of fashion as a literary and theatrical center. Abel Serles had not seen its lobby then. In fact, he had barely been born. Alexander Woollcott was just a name to him, FPA only a set of initials. Unlearned as he was in hotel lobby décor of that period, it nevertheless seemed to him that the place could hardly have changed much, and he liked its small and crowded old-fashioned lobby. He also liked the fact that you could get drinks served to you right there—but he didn't like either a tithe as much as did Godfrey Bland, who was sitting in his usual place at his usual hour: heavy-set, redfaced cherub with curly gray hair, looking into his drink as if it might be a crystal ball and he, crystal-gazer, seeing therein strange things which for all their seeming strangeness yet failed to surprise.

Also, as usual, on the table in front of him was a half-eaten sandwich. A cynic might suppose it was fortification against finding nothing to eat in Great Shores except perhaps a pot of bubbling horse-meat intended for the supper of Great Shores Midlothian Dukie and the latter's current consorts; but Godfrey had another explanation. "It's not the booze that does you in," he said "*It's the not-eating*. The boys and girls whose livers turn green and kick out on them, it's not because they drank, you know. It's because they forgot to eat! Malnutrition! But not me. No, sir. True enough, when Godfrey Bland eats he always drinks—but when Godfrey Bland drinks he always eats!"

Frederic H. Beard, hearing Abel repeat this once, had raised his eyebrows. "In other words, 'A sandwich a day keeps the A.A. away.' Maybe so, maybe so."

Bland looked up as Abel came to his table, and thrust out his lower jaw in greeting. "Hello, Abe. What are you doing here

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with this bunch of phonies?"

Abel knew better than to presume on Bland's description of the Algonquin habitués, being well aware that Bland reserved such criticism for himself. "The West Side for morning, the East Side for afternoon, and the Village for evening," Abel said.

Bland cocked his head and moved his mouth reflectively. "Well, as philosophy, it has its faults. But as an aphorism, it'll do. Emil! What are you having, Abe?"

Emil, white-jacketed, hovered over them. Abel had a *shtick* he'd been waiting for the proper occasion to use. It might as well be this one. "A double Demerara," he said.

Emil beamed, Bland stared. "What in the name of Vishnu is even a single Demerara?" he demanded.

"Very fine rum, sir, from British Guiana," Emil said, "*Very* fine rum. No ice, of course, sir."

"Of course not," Abel said virtuously, no sacrifice being too great for his art.

Bland looked impressed, as he was meant to be. "Well, I suppose you might as well drink it while you can still get it," he said. "Look what happened to Cuban cigars . . . British Guiana, hey? A government headed by a *dentist*, for crying out loud! You know what's the trouble with dentists, Abe? They've all got inferiority complexes because they're not doctors."

Emil returned with the double Demerara and a drink to replace the one which Bland had by this time finished, which was nominally a martini—although Abel knew that no vermouth was ever allowed to come near it—and Bland drank up, with a gesture to Abel to do likewise.

The rum wasn't bad, although Abel would rather have had it with lots of coke, lots of ice, and half of a lime.

He had paid for this round, allowed Bland to pay for the next. Whether or not he would be able to afford the third, Abel was uneasily unsure. Perhaps it wouldn't come to that. And Bland babbled on.

"I don't know what's the matter with most of you writers," he said, waving a plump hand to a publisher's editor who had just come in. "Think you're a bunch of artists, for crying out loud. Want to know something? You're not. Artists either have patrons or else they go and starve in a garret and are happy about it. Writers don't want to starve, not that I blame 'em, and they don't have patrons, not that they should. Writers are—most of 'em—*small businessmen*—that's what they are. None of you want to admit it, though. Some of you, you can write fine, but you can't meet a deadline to save your lives.

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Now, what kind o' way is that to run a small business?

"Tom Carp, you take Tom Carp, a *lovely* writer. But—look—I come to him, I call him up, I say 'Tom, I've got an assignment for you. Two sex novels. Good terms, good advance. Six months to write 'em. You can use a pseudonym. What do you say?' 'Swell,' he says, 'swell.' And then I find out he's got three other assignments, he's two months past the deadline on one, a *year*—for crying out loud!—past the deadline on the other, and *two years* past the deadline on the third."

He picked up his glass, moodily set it down again. "So of course I had to say, 'Sorry, Tom.' Made me feel rotten, because he's a *lovely* writer. Too good for sex novels, but, then, there you are. Now, I've got four or five guys I could get like *that*. Clients of mine, too, which Tom isn't, any more than you are. And they'd meet the deadlines with time to spare. So what's the trouble? The trouble is, they're rotten writers, that's the trouble. Good enough to write one of these crummy little items that pay $500 for all rights. But not good enough for what Clay and Curtain have in mind. They're branching out, had good luck with Crime and Science Fiction; now they want to try Sex. Of course they want something better than ordinary hackwork."

Godfrey Bland brooded a long moment. Then he smiled, somewhat twistedly. Another of his troubles was, he said, that business was too good. All his clients, the topnotch ones, were up to their navels in contracts for books. Meanwhile, he had contracts of his own to supply books for eager publishers.

He had called up or tried to call up other writers, clients of other agents, or acting as their own agents—he wasn't greedy for the measly ten percent—and with what results? Bob Bigelow couldn't take time off from his play, Saunders Pierce (*né* Siegfried Poltz, and who could blame him) was doing a series of biographies of famous women for a hardcover publisher, Nissim Stone was in Spain doing research, and so it went.

"Hmmm, yes, I see your problem," Abel Serles said. He sighed.

"Sophisticated sex novels, that's what these have to be."

"Hmm, yes, I see—"

"Not just *love*—love is for animals, only human beings can appreciate lust. But sophisticated lust, you understand."

"Well—"

Abruptly, Godfrey Bland ceased staring into his glass of gin, swung his head around and looked Abel Serles in the face. "What are *you* doing these days, Abe?" he asked.

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"I'm working on some short stories, Godfrey."

The literary agent jerked his head back, stared at the younger man reproachfully. "Short *sto*ries? What a disgusting phrase. Short stories haven't been economical since—since—well, not for years. All right, I grant you" his tone was indulgent, "that short stories are more economical than poems. True. But nobody tries to make a living out of poems. Novels!" He prodded Serles with a fat red knuckle. "*Novels*! That's where the money is!"

Things were beginning to move. Bland almost always had assignments to give out, and when he didn't, he knew who did.

"Sex novels, you mean?" Serles asked, his tone somewhat amused, somewhat scornful—and his mind on his unpaid rent and empty refrigerator.

Bland raised a cautionary finger. "So*phis*ticated sex novels. Otherwise, why would I bother? What are you worrying about? Your reputation? Use a pseudonym. I think we've got a couple of house-names you could choose from, or make up your own. What the hell, fellow, *you're* sophisticated! Anyone who knows a brand of booze *I* never heard of, *has* to be. One thousand on signing the contract and another thousand on delivery of an acceptable manuscript—can you beat those terms? No, of course you can't. What do you say?"

"Well—"

"Come around to the office tomorrow morning. If you need an advance we can arrange for you to have something right away. What time is it?" Abruptly his mood changed. "I've got a train to make. I'll rush like hell, and then it'll stop in Brooklyn for an hour to contemplate its navel or something. Oh, well. See you tomorrow, Abe. *Emil*!" Godfrey Bland paid the tab and plodded out.

It had all gone as Serles had hoped. Not that he hoped, exactly, for two sex novels; but he would have taken anything that came down the pike: juveniles, health fads, Cuban exposés pro or con, the role in the Civil War of the Confederate Bureau of Weights and Measures, or fast-moving novels of crime in which the hardboiled detective hero shoots the erring blonde one inch to the right of her appendectomy scar; such was the urgency of Abel's financial situation.

He sat in a mildly pleasant daze induced not only by success but by two double Demeraras on an almost empty stomach. Authors, editors, agents, publishers, PR men, Girls Friday in a wide variety of shapeliness, actors and actresses and old ladies from Dubuque came and went, gabbling and silent, and off in one corner a man with a beard calmly chang-

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a little baby. Serles was erving, with academic interest y, that it was a little boy baby, en someone gestured to him m halfway across the lobby. bbling only in the slightest, he it over.

'I'm Jack Foster," said the turer. "We met, briefly, at Bob elow's autographing party en his book came out." It was publisher's editor to whom nd had waved earlier.

'Oh, yes, you're with—" The ne of the firm failed him.

'Samuel Rice. We're still kind new. We're young, but we're wing daily. How about a nk?"

Abel shook his head. "I've paid cocktail hour all the obeisance going to get," he said. "But this is on the expense account have a sandwich."

"All right," Foster said iably. "Let's go in the taurant. I'm in the mood for cool green salad myself." He s a thin man in his late thirties, h dusty brown hair.

They talked about Bob elow's book for a while, then ster asked—almost inevitably—at Abel was working on "these ys." And was told. The editor ve a tiny sigh. "Short stories n't in our line, I'm afraid. We t might bring out a volume of wly discovered tales by Edgar lan Poe, then again we just ght not. Nonfiction is our chief product. When I say product, that's just what I mean—not to underrate the books, you understand; but we sort of specialize in items by people who've got something to say but who aren't professional writers and don't know how to say it. We provide them with professional assistance—"

"Ghosting, you mean?"

"Ghosting, I mean," Foster said, still equably. "The actual writer gets an acknowledgement in the credits somewhere, but none of this *As Told To* stuff, which makes the author of the first instance sound like an illiterate, which he sometimes is. And then we publicize. We publicize very, very much. You may or may not remember, but we are Samuel Rice *Associates*. We've got all kinds of associates in all kinds of media, and when we puff a book, believe me the book *stays* puffed. It sells and sells and sells. Are you interested?"

"Yes."

"You're not doing anything for Godfrey right at the moment?" He ate salad as Abel explained that Bland had made him an attractive proposal to which, however, he had not definitely committed himself. "All right," said Foster, spooning up a dab of dressing. "If you definitely uncommit yourself, and Godfrey isn't sore about it—and he's enough of an old pro himself not

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to be—you can call me tomorrow for an appointment. I can't tell you now what it is, but I can tell you that it's a lot better than sex novels. There's more money in it, for one thing. And for another thing, you write some piece of paperback tripe, it's dead three months after it hits the stand, and who remembers who wrote it? Whereas a credit like this one, even if you don't get your name on the cover—well, it's a hard cover, not a soft one. And you know what a difference *that* can make."

Abel did. "I'll be in touch," he said.

He heard voices as he came up the stairs of the old three-story red-brick Greenwich Village building he lived in. Sally Stone was in his apartment, and so was Frederic Beard—the latter, on the telephone.

Sally and Fred were often together—had been, in fact, together when Abel first met her. Were they together rather more these days than Abel, now he came to think of it, really liked? He thought they sort of were, then realized it wasn't that so much as that he himself was not so often alone with Sally as he would have liked to be. Their friendship had been casual and comfortable and, at times, very warm indeed: "honest" was the way he had liked to think of it. Was? Had been. Not that it was now *uncom*fortable, far from it; but Abe had a while back grown aware that his own *un*willingness to be come more deeply involved wit her was resulting in her ow willingness to become less deepl involved with him; and to th problem he had as yet found n answer.

". . . nobody in this country, Old Fred was informing his in visible communicant, who migh be anywhere from Point Barro to Chula Vista, but what di ference to Abel?—Fred alway paid for his own calls; "and onl one man in Japan. He lives i Izo Prefecture, I think, I've go his name and address somewher at home, and so far as I know he's the only one who still doe hilt bindings in the Eighteent Century Satsuma style. Shall look him up for you? All righ I'll do that, Dr. Bolzack. An I'll see what dates the polishe has open for your swords, too Goodbye." He turned around an said, with satisfaction, "We eat."

"Good" said Abel. "But w won't have to wait till Dr Grulzack or whatever his name i sends you a check—I think I've got a good assignment waiting fo me tomorrow."

And Sally said, "We eat. Bu not because of your assignmen tomorrow. I brought a bag o goodies with me *right now*." Sh was a statuesque brunette, whic

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as just as good as a statuesque onde any day, with a possible lge in that she was less likely suffer from sunburn.

"I will now kiss you," Abel id, and did so. It wasn't Sally ho had said, that time, "Abe! ou look so *different* night!"—that one had gone to e in a cave in Guadalajara with ree Peace Marchers. Now, from e pride of paper bags on the ble, Sally produced two kinds smoked fish and two of soft ieese, a jar of cold sorrel soup, itter, ice cubes, whiskey, mixer, n d Bialystockers—those suc-ilent onion rolls which start out be doughnuts and then change eir minds.

"What is the decision of the ucus?" she asked.

"We eat!" declared Fred and bel with one voice, Abel adding at he would emit shrill little ueals of delight if he could get s voice up high enough, and red wanting to know what the casion was. The occasion, she formed him, was Quahog State ank and Trust Company of oston Check Day. The men gave ree cheers for the Quahog State ank and Trust Company of oston, then three more for Ed-ard Erastus Leverett XXVth.

Sally, serving out the goodies, knowledged the cheers on behalf of the absent honored. "I ill say—and this is my sincere lvice to all poor working girls—if you ever must marry and divorce, by all means let it be to and from a Boston Brahmin with more apartment houses than he knows what to do with. Edward Erastus Leverett XXVth is a *gentleman,* and I'm sure I no longer begrudge him his mother complex in the slightest. The poor man has to have *some* hobby. Dear, dreadful old Mother Leverett, with her diamond dog collar and her spastic colon; oh, well. Dinner is served."

"Any news?" Fred asked presently, his vasty beard flecked with crumbs which he carefully brushed onto his plate.

"Don't ask me," Abel demurred, reaching for another moist, pink, delicious flake of kippered salmon. "I haven't read any periodicals at all lately, except for a copy of the Sam Jones Junior High School Alumni Review, which my sister was kind enough to send me. Ask Sally."

Sally protested that she never read newspapers any more. "Not even the *Village Voice* or *The Realist.* I can stand only so many exposés of Tammany Hall and Organized Religion. However, let me see, I did catch a news program on TV this afternoon. Oh, yes." She nodded, began to tick off her fingers. "Liz has gone excommunicado again. There was another coup in North Dong Dunc. The U.S. government is either not going to raise taxes

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or not going to lower them. Somebody else is saying wicked things about the Mafia. And there was a baseball game, but I forget who played, or what the score was."

Abel made himself another drink. "Well, Fred," he said, "so now you know."

But Fred only snorted.

The premises of Samuel Rice Associates occupied two floors over a chi-chi barber shop specializing in blond rinses for aging young men and the showroom of a renegade Zoroastrian who sold imitation *objets d'art* from the Nether Orient. The elevator smelled of shampoo and curried fish, but the publishers' office was air-conditioned and nice. Two men who didn't look at all like writers sat on facing benches in the anteroom and surveyed Abel bleakly as he approached the receptionist's desk, then lost interest when she confirmed his appointment.

Jack Foster, on seeing Abel Serles enter his office, frowned slightly, as if feeling a slight pain somewhere, the location of which momentarily eluded him. Then his face cleared.

"Were you able to satisfy Godfrey?" he asked. Abel assured him that Godfrey had taken it philosophically. "Well, let's go in, then," said Foster. But he did not rise. "I don't remember if I told you or not, but this all on the q.t., whether you tal the job or not. If that isn agreeable to you—"

Abel said it was perfect agreeable. Foster nodded, got u and led the way into anoth room, which opened off his offic Seated therein was a man behi the desk, who, was, Abel assun ed, Samuel Rice; a man in fro of the desk, who had on flowered sports shirt and gol rimmed spectacles; and two m sitting in the corners of the roo on the other side of the desk.

"Sam," said Foster, "this Abe Serles, about whom, e cetera."

Mr. Rice said something a fable. The man in front of t desk looked on with interes "Abe," Foster went on, "this the gentleman with whom you w be working, if everything figur out satisfactorily. Meet Capta Marryat."

It seemed to Abel that he coul scarcely have revealed much su prise, but the man in the flowere sports shirt burst out into a hear Ha Ha! as they shook hands. "I don't believe it!" he guffawe "Well, that's okay, why *shou* he? One thing I can't stann, can't stann a dope. Please meetcha."

"My pleasure, Captain Ma ryat." Serles could, with just little effort, picture him on th poopdeck of a gravel barge.

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The "captain" laughed again. Rice and Foster smiled faintly. The two men in the corners facing the door did not change their expressions, which were expressionless.

"Yer all right, kid," the "Captain" said, taking Abel's arm just below the elbow and giving it a squeeze. "You doe know who I am, do ya? Am I c'reck? One a them writers, all a time in a nyev'ry tar, huh! Well, at's all right, never mine, you'll loin. See, leave me explain the situation to ya. These two gentlemen, Mr. Ice and Mr. Foster, they toll me yer not suppose to know my rill name jus' yet. So *I* figure, what the hell, I'll have some fun witcha. Om gunna be like a writer myself, ain' I? So Om entitle' to a pseudonymph, ain' I? *Okay*. See, when I was a kid I read this book, *Masterman Ready*, by Captain Marryat. Wadda book! *Robinson Crusoe*, you can have it. Dull as a dishwasher. *Swiss Family Robinson?* Kid stuff. But *Masterman Ready*? Great! So I figure, I'll call myself Captain Marryat. Okay?"

Abel said that it was okay with him. "Captain Marryat" hit him a friendly blow on the shoulder, repeated that he was "all right," then turned to the publisher. "Well, does he take the contrack?" he asked.

Rice cleared his throat. "Maybe Mr. Serles should know a few more details before he makes his mind up. Captain, u h, Marryat—how should I put it—has led a very interesting life—"

"*Maron!*" said Captain Marryat.

"—and now he has retired and plans to go abroad for a little while. Now, it seems to us that the story of his life and, uh, professional career would make a very interesting book. He will provide the facts, you—if it'll be you—will write it, and me and my associates will publish and publicize it. That's the general picture."

Captain M., who had been nodding and smiling, suddenly spun around. "I don't wantcha ta think I can't *write*, now, kid. I can write. Gimme a pencil. Anybody got a pencil?"

"Your word is sufficient for me, Captain," Abel assured him.

And so the conference proceeded.

The terms, Ricewise, were not grandiloquent in the e x t r e m e, consisting of the same $2000 offered for one of Mr. Godfrey Bland's much-despised sex novels. Bland (or his publishers, Clay and Curtain), it is true, did offer a rising scale of royalties dependent on subsequent editions and their sale, and Rice did not. However, no one ever expected the Bland books to *have* subsequent editions, whereas with Rice—

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doesn't go up and it doesn't go down. How come?" Rice asked and Rice answered. "Because our books don't sell on account of the writing. They sell because we push them. And a fixed royalty on a book that's pushed the way we push books is a lot better than a paper rise in royalty on a book which is not pushed. That's the picture."

Serles thought that he had seen better pictures, but there was some truth in what the publisher said. And by this time he was rather intrigued. Captain Marryat's "interesting life," whatever it was or had been like, sounded as though it might be much more interesting than confecting even a sophisticated sex novel. Or even two. And then the "Captain" himself had offers to make.

"You'll be woikin wit *me*, kid," he said. "Up in *my* place. It's a pretty classy place, air-condition', private bar, the works. Yull be eatin wit me, yull be eatin what I eat, an', kid—lemme tellya—I eat *good*. An when somebuddy eat wit me, they never even *see* the bill. O*kay*?"

"O*kay*

Captain Marryat beamed again as Abel dodged his punch. "Drawr up them papers fer the kid to sign," he directed. "I gotta go now. My masewer comes at noon." Suddenly there was no trace of geniality in his face or manner. He leveled his forefinger at Abel Serles. "Ya gotta keep ya mouth shut. Ya know that, dontcha?"

Jack Foster said, smoothly and swiftly, "Mr. Serles is aware that he is contractually obligated to maintain strict secrecy in this whole matter."

For a moment the face of Captain Marryat remained blank. Then he beamed again. "O*kay*!" he said. He snapped his fingers. The two men in the corners rose as one. "Which way the elevator? Left? See yez all again."

Abel did not linger in Foster's office. The latter told him that the contract and a check in advance of the advance would be ready in the morning. Outside, Abel automatically took a left turn. There was an elevator there, all right, but it was not the one he had come up on, and it said *Freight*. For a moment he stood there, thoughtfully. Then he pressed the button. The freight elevator rose slowly, was empty, descended slowly. The cellar was equally empty, and so was the alley—which let to the street behind the one which the building's lobby opened onto.

It was only when he was on the bus that he realized he hadn't seen in the Rice reception office, on leaving, the two men he had seen there on entering. It struck him, in retrospect, how very much in manner and looks they had resembled the two men sitting

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watchfully in the corners facing the door of the inner office. Had the man who called himself Captain Marryat made a slip of the tongue when saying that the elevator was the one on the left? Perhaps he had meant the one on the right. But, if so, wouldn't either circumspect or circuitous or rected him?

Captain Marryat, plainly, was either circumspect or circuitous or both—and, equally plainly, he did not move unaccompanied. It was not likely that the hush-hush surrounding the ghost-writing arrangement was the result of an ordinary shyness or delicacy of feeling on the part of the protagonist of the memoirs-to-be.

Abel got off the bus at Washington Arch and walked across the Park. For once its scenes failed to hold his interest—not the playing children, the pretzel and ice-cream vendors, the chess and checker players, the bohemians and beatniks, the old Italian women in their black dresses, the tourists from East Weewaw, Wisconsin, the pipe-smoking artists with canvases under their arms, the girls with their long hair, the fey young men walking their weeny dogs—none of it. And at the kiosk abaft the Sheridan Square subway station he did something he hadn't done in a long time: he bought a newspaper.

It was hours and hours too early for the coffeehouses to be open, so he went into a bar, ordered a beer, took it to an empty booth, and sipped at it while he turned the pages of the *Daily News*. He found what he was looking for, in the center photographic spread. A man was walking down the front steps of a public building and shielding his face with his hat; but enough of the face was exposed for Abel Serles to recognize it as that of Captain Marryat, so-called. The two-line caption convinced him that this not really nautical person had indeed lived "a very interesting life."

And it also informed him who, in Sally ex-Leverett's words, had been saying wicked things about the Mafia.

Frederic the Beard was in the apartment again, leafing through a sheaf of photographs of sword-tangs, and comparing them with inscriptions in an old Japanese book printed on soft Chinese paper.

"Did you get the assignment?" he asked.

"I guess so."

Fred scratched his beard, of which there was enough to have supplied a quorum of old-style Mormon Elders. "What's it for?" he asked.

"I am contractually obligated to maintain strict secrecy in this whole matter."

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"Oh, come off it! What's it about?"

"I am contractually obligated to—"

"Oh, foosh!" said Frederic Beard. He went back to his inscriptions. "Oh, well," he said, after a moment, "as long as you eat."

Abel did indeed eat, his first meal at Captain Marryat's place being a late breakfast consisting of three kinds of eggs, four of fruit juice, fried flounder, prosciutto ham, Canadian bacon, fresh whipped butter, six kinds of bread, four of pastry, seven of preserves, peanut butter, hot muffins, and Irish, English, Dutch, and American gin—these last to go with the fruit juice.

"Eat up, everybody," directed Captain Marryat, addressing Abel, the bodyguards, and a thin British secratree with white eyelashes and a rabbit nose. "Eat up, everybody—costs me a fawchin."

Everybody ate up.

The place was a penthouse overlooking the East River, with better trees growing on its terrace than Abel had seen at several country estates. He had a room just refurnished for him as a private office, with its own private bathroom; and Captain M. informed him that a bedroom was available for him as well, should he desire to spend his nights there—and informed him, also, that should Abel desire not to spend them alone, he, the host, had Telephone Numbers.

The breakfast having been eaten and its remains cleared away with dispatch by several silent servitors who had presumably been lurking in the woodwork, Captain Marryat said, with a belch and an apology, "Awright, where were we now, doll—I mean, escuse me, Miss Meadowes-Humphrey?"

And Miss Meadowes-Humphrey, after having riffled her steno pad, said, in the voice of one who reads recipes aloud on the Home Program of the BBC, "The icepick murders of the seven Sijjy Brothers in Greenpoint, Mr. Sullivan. Having been lured there under the pretense of discussing the possibilities of heavy investments in the ice-cream and dry-cleaning industries, the brothers—ah, here we are: *'Louis, the fat one, squeal like a pig, so—'* "

This recitative, which might, as far as tone was concerned, have been concerned with novel methods of confecting things from leftover rice pudding, hard-cooked eggs, and anchovy paste, was interrupted by her employer's snapping his fingers in a chagrined fashion. Miss Meadowes-Humphrey stopped as if she had been switched off.

"Did I say Greenpernt?" he addressed one of his samurai.

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" 'Ats what chew say, Big Smith."

With a sigh and a rueful shake of the head the Captain corrected the location to Red Hook. "I got, like, confused. Greenpernt was where them udder brudders got boined. Sorry, Miss. Change it, please."

Captain Marryat, alias Mr. Sullivan, alias Big Smith, turned to Abel. "The lady, here, she type up a bunch of this stuff that Mr. Ice awready seen. So while we go on, she takin' dictation, why don' you go inna yer office and look it ova? See what it needs, like. In udder woids, kid, get stahted. *Okay?*"

"Very well, Captain," Abel said.

Marryat-Sullivan-Smith snapped his gross fingers again, and the lady at once said, " '*—so we give him a couple more to shut him—*' " The door closed behind Abel and on the sad story of the seven Sijjy brothers.

Neatly arranged on the desk was a wealth of writing materials ranging from an electric-tape typewriter to a battery of gold-pointed fountain pens. There was also an embossed-leather folder of manuscript typed on paper of so good a quality that Abel had never even seen anything like it before. He seated himself in a chair of complex contours which almost adjusted itself to his back and buttocks, and drew the folder of manuscript toward him.

The author's style, at least at first, appeared to have something in common with that of Holden Caulfield. "Where my parents come from and where was they born is nobody's G.D. business and anyway they both die in the influenza epidemict in the First Worlds War and after that I'm on my own"—that was the arresting first sentence. It seemed a shame to have to change it, Abel thought.

What the manuscript possessed in forceful style, however, it lacked in organization. Plunging from the death of the author's parents and his entry into independence, it veered off from his escape from a denominational protectory into an account entitled *Nitty Gerundive Who Place a Tax on All the Cherry Syrup for New York City during Prohibition* to a description of several Syndicate conferences "holden" to consider the opportunities offered by coin-operated television; thence to an interminable apology for the author's rather intimate acquaintance with the world of crime, which was, in effect, a refusal to apologize at all; followed by thumbnail biographies of 137 big and little hoods, alive and dead.

Thereafter was a chapter on fixing municipal governments and police forces and insuring their staying fixed, a graphic description of several episodes in a

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Chicago gang war in the early thirties, a patriotic digression on the United States as the land of opportunity, and the "true facts" about Al Capone, Justice Crater, Tammany Hall, Las Vegas, someone called Little Iggy, Rum Runners' Row, Arnold Rothstein and thirty-odd more persons, places, and things.

Abel leaned back thoughtfully in the form-fitting chair, and it all but clutched at him passionately. As he seized the desk for support, his hand slipped and clawed open a drawer. Regaining his balance, he pulled the drawer farther open, revealing a cedarwood box full of fat brown cigars with Cuban accents. First he lit one, enjoying every rich molecule of its smoke. Then he slowly made a sandwich of two sheets of quasiparchment and a piece of imperial carbon paper, fitted it into the giant typewriter. He switched on the current.

For a moment his fingers brooded above the keys. Then they descended.

In 1932 Al Capone poured two glasses of wine and said to me

There would be lots of places for flashbacks, and lots of flashbacks for those places.

He wondered what there would be for lunch.

Abel had not taken advantage of the offer to spend the night at the penthouse, and consequently he was quite surprised the next morning when the doorman of the posh apartment building politely stopped him and said, "Sir, Mr. Sullivan isn't here any more."

Abel stared at the man in the uniform of a Latvian admiral. "Not— Did he leave any message? My name is Serles. You mean he won't be back at all? Moved out? No message? Well, I'll be darned."

Blankly he moved down the street, with vague notions of calling the Rice office. Would he still collect his money? Not likely. It had been *very* good food, too. A tug rounding the point of Welfare Island hooted mournfully.

As if in echo, a passing car sounded its horn briefly. Then again. He glanced at it. In front were two of Captain Marryat's sideboys. They neither looked at him nor moved at all, that he could see, but the car slowed down and the back door opened. Abel got in.

They drove uptown, crosstown, downtown, uptown again. At one time he almost caught the driver's eyes in the mirror, but the eyes weren't looking at him. At length the other man in front murmured an address. The car slowed down again, Abel got out, the car picked up speed and turned down a side street. He was only a few blocks from the address.

The building was a big old West

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Side Hotel dating from the architectural era of Stanford White. No name having been mentioned and Abel not having thought to inquire for one, he paused for a moment at the desk, nonplused. The mousy, hollow-chested little clerk, strands of colorless hair swept across his bony skull, looked up at him in silent inquiry. Light glinted on his glasses. An elderly woman with blue hair scanned the pigeonholes for mail, found none, turned and said to Abel, "Go have children," and went away.

Sullivan? Smith?

Probably not. On impulse Abel asked for Captain Marryat. The result would have utterly surprised him, had he never made an intimate purchase from a timid pharmacist. The clerk seemed to melt in upon himself, dropped his eyes, faded rather than moved away from the desk, and furtively consulted a register. He then ebbed back to the desk, still not looking up, and whispered, "Ten-o-three. Use the house phone next to the cigar stand."

No method actor assigned to interpret someone with a guilty secret would have played the role quite like that, but Abel was convinced—convinced, too, that the secret had an earlier origin than the migration of Captain Marryat to the Hotel Bellepaise.

The cigar stand, presided over by a fat man in a grizzled mustache and a stained vest, was just what he appeared to be, making no concessions to the underarm deodorant trade and even having a tiny blue-tipped gas jet in a brass sconce for customers to light their smokes at.

"Still ring-ing," said the operator.

Then, very quickly, "*Yeah?*"

"Abel Serles."

"C'mon up."

Abel went up.

"All new people onna tent' flaw," said the shriveled elevator man.

"Oh, yes?"

"Sure. All re-renovated. Air-conditioned. Ready lass week. But they move in lass night. *Tent'* flaw. Watcha step."

Abel wondered how many other hideyholes were even now in preparation in case another flight of the Tartar Horde should prove indicated. The two men who had driven him from the East Side were already on guard in the corridor; they looked up with their usual sliding, opaque glances. One yawned, another picked at his fingernails. Abel walked on down to Room 1003 and knocked.

The new suite was a mixture of fake French Provincial and midwestern Swedish Modern, as if two rival interior decorators had come to an uneasy truce. The Captain and his staff were once again at meat; he informed Abel that he was just in time, and in-

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vited his participation. "Good steaks," the Captain said. "They fly 'em up from Youraguay. Go on. Take. Take."

In a few moments Abel was as greasy about the chops as his host and Miss Meadowes-Humphrey, and then became sticky as well, investigating what was beyond doubt the largest selection of melons he had ever seen in his life. The primest, which fairly swooned away on his tongue in sheer delight, bore on their bosoms roughly printed little tags which might have been Arabic, Persian, or Pushtu. After prawns, mussels, *écrivisses,* wild strawberries, and other goodies, followed by tiny cups of *cawwa* and brandy, Captain Marryat fired his usual salute to the excellence of the meal, then turned to business.

"I read yer stuff, kid, an' it's okay. Ya think it'll sell a lotta books? Bestseller?" Abel said he hoped so, but that it was impossible to predict. Conditions in the book trade, he said, were very fluid. Captain Marryat frowned. "Mr. Ice, he give me his woid, him an' his partners would promote it."

"I'm sure they will."

"Well, *okay,* then. Yer office is over on this side now. Let's see whatcha can do. Miss, where we at?"

Meadowes-Humphrey cleared her throat with a little whinny, peered into her notes. "Assignation of Machine-gun Jack McGurn with a daughter of Senator X, Mr. Sullivan. *'Jack was shacked up with—'* "

The new office was as soundproof as the other. The furniture and equipment were not identical—the typewriter, for example, was pearl-gray instead of lime-green—but it was just as good. The cigars were green instead of brown. Abel looked once at the Hudson, then read over his previous day's work, then turned to the source material. This time he didn't have to put paper into the mill, it was already there. He lit his cigar and gazed at the pseudo-Utrillo on the wall facing him. Then he set to.

When I was setting up slot machines in Louisiana I learned that not every donation to a "parish" has to do with religion, and

Sally had not once been married to a Bostonian for nothing.

"Where do they get off charging prices like that for the drinks in a place like this?"

Abel grunted. "That's the tax for not having to watch old movies. You always pay more in a bar without TV."

She fussed a while more, then sipped her Scotch sour, watching him. "Has your assignment gotten you down?"

"No, why do you say that? It's

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probably the best assignment I've ever had."

"Then how come you're so grim?"

He gnawed at a potato chip. "Well, if you must know. I was almost run down by a car on Sixth Avenue today, and besides that it scared the hell out of me, it's made me think about the vanity of human wishes, and what is our life but a dunghill smoke, and all that sort of thing. And if I'm grim, that's why."

She gave a great b o s o m - swelling sigh—and instantly he became less grim. "Look! There's Fred. *Fred!*"

The moment was gone before it had well arrived, and Fred Beard came towering through the bar, angrily brushing away at the clouds of smoke.

"It's outrageous," he growled, crowding his legs under the table.

"Yes. Pity they don't all chew, or take snuff." Abel was feeling crotchety.

Fred stared at him. "What are you talking about? Oh. Smoke. No. Thesis typists! Idiots! I rupture myself earning the money to pay the cretin—and then she types eleven copies without numbering the pages. Eft. Toad. Gelded sow. And now I've got to number eleven times a hundred twenty-five pages by myself!"

Sally took his hand and patted it. "Never mind, Fred. We'll hold a numbering party, the three of us, and get it done for you in an hour or so. Maybe later tonight. Won't we, Abe? . . . Poor Abe, he's feeling grim. A car almost ran over him today."

Abel glowered, having h a d other plans or at least hopes for later that night with Sally, and ignored Fred's clucks of sympathy. Suddenly his drink gave a lurch in his hand. Fred and Sally, having noticed n o t h i n g, chattered on together. And the voice in the booth behind him repeated, "Where is Big Smith?"

"Who in the hell is B i g Smith?"—a second voice.

"Some crook they're looking for. That's what the headline says. 'Where Is Big Smith?' "

The second voice obviously couldn't care less. "Where is Bug Stuart, that's what *I* want to know. Why doesn't he get his big fat backside over here? I haven't got all night."

Muttering something a b o u t going to the head, Abel got up, observed what newspaper was on the table in the booth behind, and promptly went out to buy a copy.

Where Is Big Smith?

The subject or object of one of the biggest u n d e r c o v e r manhunts in recent years, ex-Syndicate stalwart Harold "Big" Smith—alias Jerry Sullivan, alias Popo Bogarty, and many other aliases—was still hiding out in

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parts unknown today. Earlier this week he sang like a canary to this newspaper's reporters and presumably made many Syndicate ears ring, because he immediately dropped out of sight again. Syndicate hatchetmen would like to know where he is. So would State Senator Elbert Dibbler (Rep., Chenango County), chairman of the Committee on Urban Crime. So would Police Commissioner Brenahan, crusading Congressman Cutler

Abel had just resettled himself at the table, glowered at Sally cuddled up into Fred's beard, and taken his drink in hand again, when it gave another lurch.

"Where is Big Smith?" a voice boomed.

"That is the question which—click."

"Turn that damn radio down," one bartender directed another, a second after it ceased to be necessary.

Sally separated herself from the country's leading authority on Japanese swords. "Abe," she said, "what you need is a good night's sleep after that awful shock today. Fred and I are going over to his place and we'll do the page numbering all by ourselves, don't you bother. You just drink some hot milk and go to bed."

He watched them wordlessly as they went out. Then he paid for his drink and left. On the way home his moody eye was arrested by the blue flicker of a TV screen in an open bar. "—and that's the scene in North Dong Dunc. On the *home* scene the big question of the moment continues to be—Where is Big Smith?"

Abel cursed. And went home to bed.

He dreamed of the squabs they had had for supper at the Bellepaise, a giant pot of them, stuffed with wild rice, and garnished with bacon, peppers, mushrooms, and flaky black bits of truffle. The squabs twittered (do squabs *twitter*? part of his mind wondered) petulantly throughout the dream meal, and then began to scratch at the pot. The scratching became a scraping, grew louder. For some reason everything was dark, and then Abel realized he was wide-awake and in bed and that the scratching and scraping was coming from his rear window.

The pillow hit the floor with a faint noise as he leaped, so to speak, into a sitting position. Someone shouted, *"What's that? Who's there?"* and he recognized the voice as his own. There was a silence, then the slap-slap of feet on the fire escape. He jumped out of bed, tripped, regained his balance, and rushed over, flinging up the window with a bang. *"Police!"* he cried. *"Police! Police!"*

The police, who arrived

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somewhat later than immediately, consisted of a pair of neat, well-spoken young men. "There you are," said one, pointing. "Jimmy marks. How do you like that? Didn't even tap the joint first, to make sure there was nobody at home. That's what we mean," he said, turning to Serles, "by 'the nerve of a burglar.' "

Something suddenly and belatedly occurred to Abel. "I'll tell you something else they didn't tap first. And that's the window. It wasn't even locked."

Both policemen laughed heartily. "Well, that's the way those addicts are," said one. "They even forget their rudimentary intelligence."

"You're sure it was an addict, officer?"

The officer nodded. "Bound to be. These cheap burgalaries—I mean, beg your pardon, but this apartment is no fur loft or jewelry store—they're always the work of an addict. That's what narcotics does to you, undermines the very fabric and basis of society. If I had my way, anybody caught even for a first offense, pushing—the firing squad. Hey?"

"That's where you are *wrong*, Alfred," the second policeman said, softly and earnestly. "That has *never* solved a problem yet and it never *will*. The *only* answer is to make these preparations *le*gal, like they do in Siam or wherever it is. Then these unfortunate people would not be obliged to come climbing through this gentleman's window in the hopes of stealing his typewriter at half-past two in the morning."

By the time they concluded their sociological discussion and had left, Abel found he was no longer tired. So he walked across town to the vicinity of Tompkins Square and woke up Fred Beard.

The sword sage peered through his tangled locks and muttered and snorted. "Is Sally here?" Abel asked.

"No, she went home. I thought she advised you to do the same."

"I did, but there was no milk to heat. I thought I'd borrow some of yours."

"Foosh," said the Beard. "Oh, I suppose you might as well come in. Don't sit *there*! Those are my notes on steel analysis of the early Takugawa Era—"

"Did you number the pages?"

"Yes."

"I'll bet you did . . . What do you think, Fred? Do squabs twitter?"

After a restless several hours on Fred's sofa he returned home to shave, there having been no equipment for such purpose in the Beard's establishment within the memory of man. He found his place in ruins. The chairs had been smashed, the mattress slashed, likewise the pillows and couch, the typewriter was a tangle of broken keys and springs, shattered

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dishes were everywhere . . .

"Well, maybe I was wrong, Alfred," one of the policemen said on their second visit. "*This* is not a narcotics-type incident at all. *This* looks like a classical revenge-type bit. Remember that place over on Perry Street? There was this psychology student, female," he explained, turning to Abel, "who had been living with a would-be poet who was under psychoanalysis. That situation finally broke up, then he dropped out of his analysis, and then he decided that it was all her fault, so he went over to her new place of residence and—"

Abel interrupted him. "I'm quite sure," he said bitterly, "that none of my ex-girl friends is responsible for this."

"Ah," said Alfred, gently rebuking him, "but what Patrolman Roberts was just going to explain to you before you got abrupt, see, this nutty kid picked the wrong apartment to wreck. Maybe that's the same case here. Now, the super tells us that the party downstairs is on Fire Island, the party upstairs is in Provincetown, and the party across the hall, *he* was just coming home from having been out all night just as we were coming up the stairs. So there was nobody around to hear anything. *What* a mess!"

Bemused and bewildered, as well as not a little outraged, Abel Serles took the IRT uptown and arrived at the Bellepaise in time for early breakfast, where he was mildly surprised to see Miss Meadowes-Humphrey already on duty, pouring the tea and buttering the scones or shew-bread or whatever they were. A wicked and unworthy thought entered his mind. Could it be? Could they be? —namely, Miss Meadowes-Humphrey and Captain Marryat? No, no, impossible; surely those albino eyelashes, those meagre measurements, could hold no illicit (or even, damn it, *licit*) attractions for one so obviously designed by Nature to seek for depth of chest and breadth of hip.

"How ya comin?" was the Captain's question. Miss Meadowes-Humphrey continued nibbling rapidly. No, no, nothing more than too many years ill-nourished on spotted dog, bubble-and-squeak, jam tarts, thin milk in thick tea, oleaginous chips and cabbage, cabbage, cabbage, were responsible for her early appearance at the Captain's table. Abel decided to keep his troubles to himself, and joined in on the crisp brown trout which had only the previous day been swimming in some cold mountain stream.

"Ya look tie-ed, kid."

"Didn't get much sleep last night."

Captain Marryat gave a lewd chuckle, and they presently parted

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r the day's work. The noon meal as subsequently served up by high-class wholesale Rumanian staurant. Abel partook copious- of the mushk-steak and the llied calves-foot, but thought ere was really more eggplant an he cared to encounter even such various forms. He won- red if the Captain's gourmet arnings were undermining his vn simple writerly tastes, always fore so readily satisfied with nat was cheapest and to hand. s a background accompaniment such soul-searching the levision demanded: *Where is g Smith?* And the radio echoed: *here is Big Smith?*

"Leave 'em fine out," grunted e missing man, stuffing himself th Balkan desserts. Abel left m and his stenographer capitulating the bloody end of e Fat Dempster, who, as luck ould have it, was run to earth night in a meat-packing plant East New York, New Jersey. bel spent the rest of the day ing to organize the memoirs they related to the non- shionable suburb of Cicero, Illi- is, during the late twenties. And ien he opened the door of his artment that evening, an ex- osion flung him back against e hall wall and broke several ndows.

"Faulty wiring there," said the tective later, chidingly. "Ob- usly that was meant to go off when you opened the *kitchen* door. Otherwise, why would they have put it in the kitchen?"

Abel felt sickish and aching, but there appeared to be no fractures. "I'll speak to the electricians' union," he muttered.

The detective surveyed him with eyes as bright and alien as a bird's. "This is the third attempt at your apartment in twenty-four hours, isn't it? Come on, you must have *some* idea who or why?"

Abel shook his head. He made a little speech. He had lived in Greenwich Village for six years, in this same house for four, in the apartment for three. In all that time, he said, he had never even so much as been troubled by a friendly drunk; and he had *no* idea whatsoever.

The detective listened, giving little ornithological nods. As soon as Abel had finished he said, "Come on, you must have *some* idea who or why?"

Feeling bruised and ill, wanting to lie down, Abel, as soon as he could get away from the birdy man, went out. He got a taxi and went up to Sally's place in Chelsea. He was feeling increasingly sick and shaky, and the thought that she might not be in was the greatest fear he could imagine.

But she was in.

He had on numerous other occasions sought her there for a friendly drink or a friendly talk;

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but he never before had sought her or thought of her as refuge, home, or healing.

As he did now.

She screamed on seeing him, and Frederic H. Beard, who had been joining her for a light supper, leaped up in such alarm that a piece of egg yolk fell onto his ample beard. "Abe, what happened?" they cried, almost together.

"I want to lie down."

Together they helped him into bed, took off his shoes, and then, as he began to shiver, covered him with blankets. Sally got him to drink a shot of brandy, and then she repeated, "But what *happened*"

"They tried to kill me."

"*Who?*"

"The Mafia."

Fred and Sally stared at him. Then she said, "But, Abe, listen dear, that's only a tiny little outfit over near Bleecker Street. They just get a rakeoff on cigarette machines. I *know* one of them, Patsy Something-or-other, such a nice little man. They don't try to *kill* people."

The shakes had begun to diminish. "I don't mean that Mafia. I mean the real Mafia. The Syndicate. They tried to kill *me*." And he told them of what had been going on in his apartment, and she gave a little scream.

"What about that car that almost ran you down?" Her fingers made a paling over which her large frightened eyes peeped.

"Oh, God! I forgot about that." He wanted to say, Give me some more brandy, but all he got out was "Gick." So he pointed a quivery finger until they poured him another. His friends were patient people: they let him get about half of the second shot down before asking the obvious question, namely, Why did the Syndicate want Abel Serles killed?

Abel pondered. Between bed blankets, and brandy he was now beginning to feel warmer. And better. "Well, I'm not supposed to say," he said.

"Oh, come *on*! What is this the Code of the Underworld? Sally, talk sense to him—"

"Abe, dear—"

He squirmed in his bed. Was he really bound to keep silence unto the grave? No. Absurd. "Listen. You know all this recent business about Where Is Big Smith?" Sally nodded, Beard blew out of the corner of his mouth a scornful snort which fluttered the end of his piratical mustachio.

"It's everywhere—newspapers, TV, radio. Disgusting. Two hundred ancient and priceless specimens of the Japanese swordsmith's craft are scattered around this country in the houses of people who picked them up as mere souvenirs at the end of the war, and nobody lifts a finger to have their whereabouts s

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uch as identified—and look at l this hullaballoo about a cheap ook who—" He stopped and ized the sides of his vast beard ith both hands. "Don't tell me!" exclaimed. "Don't tell me. *ou*?"

Abel nodded. "Me. I know here he is. That's why they're ying to kill me."

Sally sat down on the side of e bed, suddenly and heavily. Oh, my. Oh, dear. Things like is never happened in Boston. 'hat are we going to *do*?"

Fred was shaking his head. That doesn't make sense, Abe. ssuming the Syndicate knows at you know where he is, ouldn't they try to get you to *ll*? First by bribery, most likely, en by—well, *force*. But they ouldn't try to *kill* you. Further- ore, *how* do you know—"

Abel said, "Because I've got e assignment to ghost-write his emoirs, and they don't want the ublicity . . . I wish to hell I'd ever taken the job. It seemed ce fun until all this started."

But Fred was still shaking his ead. "It *still* doesn't figure, Abe. ow, I'm no authority on the afia, but from what I've heard id read, they don't operate that ay. They seem to keep their llings confined either to their vn members or to people they y to victimize who won't hold ill for it. After all, you're only ie among many, many people who are trying to expose the Syndicate. The cops, Congress, the State Legislature, the newspapers, so on. They're not trying to kill *them*. Why would they want to kill *you*?"

Abel shook his head. For some reason the thought of the many magnificent victuals served up to him at Captain Marryat's table came to his mind. The condemned man had eaten not only a hearty breakfast, but tasty b r u n c h, gourmet dinner, and exotic supper as well . . . He repeated now, to his friends, what he had said to the detective: all the years he had lived in Greenwich V i l l a g e without trouble, and now—

"First, someone tries to run me down. Then someone tries to break into my apartment, then someone *does* break into my a p a r t m e n t — a n d wrecks it—maybe looking for an address, maybe just to warn me. Then somebody plants a bomb in my kitchen. Who else could it be, if not the Syndicate?"

Fred cocked his head, still dubious. Sally was wide-eyed. "But," said Abel, "hey, listen . . . Wouldn't even gangsters be smart enough to know that killing the man who's writing the exposé would result in *more* publicity, not in less?" It didn't make sense, Abel felt that himself. But what did, in this whole e v i l - c r a z y business?

Fred and Sally continued to

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debate the matter. Abel closed his eyes. He was aware that he was falling asleep, but felt no desire to do otherwise . . . He awoke with the smell of coffee in the room—plain, good, ordinary supermarket coffee, the kind Sally used; nothing exotic, very much like Sally herself. "Hey, can I have some of that?" he called. It was broad daylight.

"Well, you certainly caught up on your sleep," she said, coming in with two cups. "Which I'm very glad of. Oh, you looked just *terrible* last night. Well. Now we have to decide what you're going to do. Of course you're welcome to hide out here as long as you like. *Or*. Edward Erastus has this eccentric cousin—of course, *I* always got along just fine with her—but anyway, she owns this island off the coast of Maine, and I'm sure if I call her she'll be happy to put you up. She's really very nice."

Abel shook his head. "I'm going to make a phone call, okay?" She nodded, and he dialed the offices of Samuel Rice Associates.

Jack Foster refused to believe he was serious at first, but, convinced at last, was obviously disturbed. "I'll talk to Rice right away. Don't hang up." He was back almost at once. "Rice says to waste no time, but go to the police at once—"

"And tell them everything?"

"Everything."

"Well, fine, then. I guess you' be hearing from me soon. I hope. He turned to Sally. "The bossma says to tell the police."

She seemed uncertain "Well . . . whatever you think Abe; anyway, you can always sta here, or go to Pogunquit Islan But let me know, whatever hap pens. And if I'm not here I probably be at Fred's."

It was another item in h unhappiness that he knew sh probably would be.

A dazed-looking woman wit a black eye sat on the bench i the precinct house; three your men with shiny black hair an leather jackets to match wer slouched in chairs, snickering ain lessly when they caught on another's eye; and an old ma scanned a racing sheet. The des sergeant was engaged in eas discourse with one uniformed ar two un-uniformed men, but lool ed up at Abel's approach ar said, "Well, what's your troubl fellow?"

Now for it. The gian disclosure. "I know where B Smith is," he said.

All four burst out laughing.

"I mean it," Abel cried, ou raged.

"Oh, boy, what a bazzazz," sa one of the plainclothesmen. "S you know where Big Smith i Goody, goody for you. Well, no

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you go and tell that palooka that Lieutenant Dick Murphy said, 'Hello' and wants to know who-in-the-hell spread all this talk that the Commissioner wants to see him. Strictly an unofficial in-*quire*-y."

Abel gave a little hiccup of astonishment, at which the four laughed again. "The Commissioner *doesn't* want to see him?"

"Naah. What *for*? That big boob hasn't done nothing illegal since he shot his own big toe in Evanston, Illinoise, thirty years ago. Trying to shake down a candy store or something. And he served his time for that. *I* don't know what all this *Where Is Big Smith?* malarkey is all about. Do you?" He addressed one of his friends, who shook his head.

Lieutenant Murphy proceeded to inform Abel that Big Smith owed his connection with the Syndicate entirely to the fact that he had once been married to the late sister of one Vinny, a middle-upper rank Syndic, who kept him around for laughs.

Abel swallowed. "Then how come he blew the whistle on them? I mean, aren't *they* after him? I mean—"

Murphy shrugged. "Big Smith was strictly a run-out-and-get-me some-coffee or give-Tommy-a-hotfoot character, until he made a lot of money in the market. He loves to eat and he loves to play these cheap, common practical jokes, and he loves to shoot off his mouth and talk himself up. And that's all there is to Big Smith, and only some dumb apple-knocker like this upstate Senator Whatever-his-name-is would think different. Those dumb apple-knockers are always looking for a way to insult the City and not have to reapportionate the Legislature, anyway. So, if that's all you come to see us about, thanks, and maybe you'll excuse us now, and we'll get on with something important."

As Abel stood in the doorway, poised for the street, he heard one of them repeat, "Where Is Big Smith?" and they all burst out laughing again.

Serles walked slowly along, trying to figure things out. He considered one thing with another, and it seemed to him that a certain configuration was beginning to become dimly visible. Half a block later, he saw a public telephone, and, on a sudden decision, went into the booth.

"Mr. Bland is on the telephone to London," said the girl at the switchboard.

"Let me speak to one of his assistants, then. George or Mary or Sanford."

He wasn't quite certain which one was talking to him a few moments later, but he identified himself and asked, "Do you know who the 'associates' of Samuel

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Rice Associates are? I'll explain another time." The distant epicene voice of George or Sanford or perhaps Mary named s e v e r a l. Abel thanked him, or her, and hung up.

He then dialed again, rapping impatiently on the tiny shelf, until he heard Jack Foster's voice. Yes, said Abel, he had been to the police. And if Foster, Rice, and Captain Marryat would like to hear about it they could damn well meet him in the office in an hour.

"Listen," Foster said, "you can't—"

Abel hung up.

The Captain greeted him with a wave of his hamlike hand and a large "How ya doin?" Rice expressed instant sympathy, and was about to say more, when Abel overrode him.

"Lieutenant Dick Murphy said to tell you Hello," he addressed Captain Marryat. "He says you're a big palooka and you haven't broken a law since 1939."

"Hoddaya like that fa noive! Listen—"

Abel turned to Rice. "This whole buildup about 'Where Is Big Smith?' is a clever piece of publicity cooked up by your associates in radio, television, and newspapers—that's the gimmick, isn't it?"

Rice nodded. "Coming along very nicely too. Should help get a big price for the movie rights, and maybe a TV and magazine series, too."

Abel said, "And it would have been even more helpful publicity if I'd told the police all about the attempts on my life, wouldn't it?"

Rice stared, frowned. "You mean, you *didn't*? You mean—now just a minute, here. I don't like the tone of your voice at all. You mean you think *we* were behind the violence?"

Foster said, "I can assure you straight out—we had nothing to do with it."

"No, Jack, that you didn't, and maybe your boss didn't. But what about Captain Marryat here? God knows I've given a lot of thought to the whole thing. It *had* to be wrong, my thinking it was the Syndicate doing all that to me, because the Syndicate would be smart enough to know it would only create *more* publicity. Well, who then? Obviously—" His gaze settled on his s o m e t i m e collaborator.

Captain Marryat bounced to his feet and thrust his hand at Abel, who danced away from it. "Yer awright, kid!" the Captain boomed. "Ya gotta good head on ya! What-the-hell. We're *lookin'* fa publicity, ain't we? We wanna sell lotsa books, don't we? Me an my udder pals, we wooden hoitcha, not fra million dollars! Laugh it up, kid. Laugh it up. I mean—

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jeest, you musta look funny, dodgin' that cah!" He ha-ha'd happily. "I mean, if we *wanned* a kill ya, we could of. As fa that liddle cherry bomb—"

Abel turned to the bookmen. "I've had the corpuscles scared out of me three times and my apartment wrecked twice. My zeal for my art doesn't include having either happen to me even once. In short—I'm through. You're welcome to what I've already written on your tame hood's life and times."

Foster, in a tired voice, said he was sorry; his employer shrugged. "We won't need what you already wrote. Writers aren't hard to find. Just return your advance and—"

Serles stared at him for a moment. Then he said, "I tell you what, Mr. Ice. We'll compare the damage to my apartment with the amount of the advance, and if there's any difference in your favor, I'll give it to some worthy cause. Gentlemen and Captain Marryat, goodbye."

As the door closed behind him, Abel heard Captain Marryat having the last word, and a mournful one it was. "Kid's got no sense a yuma," said Big Smith.

It was a hot day, and Abel, proceeding north on Fifth Avenue, felt every degree of it. There were several things that badly wanted taking care of.

His apartment was one of them, but he could put the basic repairs in professional hands and leave the rest for later. There would have to be a "later"—for one reason because someone **else** would be consulted in the restoration, and for another because he felt he both required and deserved an immediate vacation.

If Sally's eccentric-ex-cousin-by-marriage was so sure to have been willing to put him up on Pogunquit Island by himself, it was exceedingly likely that she would put him up accompanied by Sally (Fred, after all, could make do with his swords); and he intended to put this pleasurable prospect before the former Mrs. Edward Erastus Leverett XXV in reasonable hopes that she would not remain so-styled for very much longer. Life, after all, was too short for him to go on keeping one of its most important facets at arm's length forever.

But repairs to and replacements for the apartment, as well as transportation in comfort to the State of Maine, would exhaust what remained of his finances. Certainly he could write while he was there—after a decent interval, that is—but he would have to have something assigned him to write, and an advance against this assignment to finance the rest of his holiday.

His honeymoon. . .

He looked at his watch. It was

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3:43. Without hurrying he could catch Godfrey Bland at just the right moment, over his late afternoon cup in the lobby of the Algonquin Hotel. If he were in luck he might still be able to get those two sophisticated sex novels for himself after all—or possibly—why not?—a better assignment. Hadn't he been settling for second-best and worse long enough?

It was at this moment that another and sudden thought occurred to him. Clasping his hand to the front of his collar, he discovered that he was not wearing a necktie. He also realized that he was not on Sixth-Avenue, but on Fifth.

Without a moment's hesitation, and with only the briefest mental acknowledgment to Captain Maryat, Abel Serles strode into the lavish interior of the nearest swank haberdashery, and made a sizeable donation to a worthy cause.

"Nothing gaudy," he directed. "Just your best plain silk foulard."

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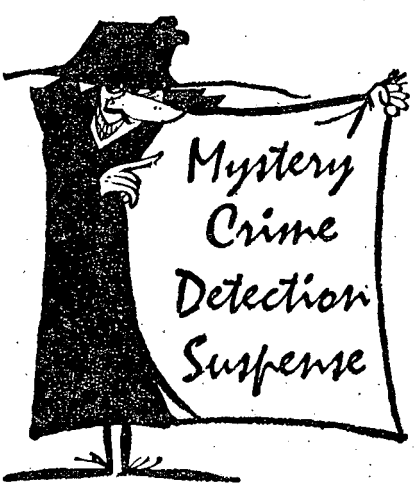

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another pair of *NEW* procedurals featuring

NICOLAS FREELING's Van der Valk

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J. J. MARRIC's (John Creasey's) Gideon

Here is the third in Nicolas Freeling's new series about Van der Valk, Chief Inspector of Amsterdam's Juvenile Brigade—and one of the best of the series. This story fully realizes Mr. Freeling's aim—to "blend entertainment with meaning." And surely he makes his "point" in this story of a riot by high-school students, of violence and vandalism, of social injustice, of one of the problems that the forces of law and order are facing in nearly every country in the world. And surely, too, Jean de la Fontaine's fable of the animals ill of the plague has as much "point" today as it had when it was first written three hundred years (yes, three centuries!) ago. . .

VAN DER VALK AND THE HIGH SCHOOL RIOT

by NICOLAS FREELING

ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION outside a high school! Banal at first sight. These things broke out like strawberry rash, thought Chief Inspector Van der Valk indulgently from the other end of the street. Bright June morning and the children were letting off steam. And one couldn't blame them! He sympathized secretly; one could find few attitudes more antiquated and rigid than those of the chalky civil servants in the Education Department. These children had to sit passively being stuffed, rows of tiny computers being programmed, and they felt, however obscurely, that whatever

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education was it wasn't this.

Now they were dancing and screaming like dervishes; wake the teachers up, perhaps. But as Van der Valk got nearer he changed his mind. Throwing stones—that had to be stopped. The little dears were tiresomely incapable of distinguishing between idealism and vandalism.

At that moment a police car slowed, turned in off the street, and tried to force a way through 300 or more, excited adolescents to the massive, closed front door. A mistake; an active, unintimidated group jumped on the hood, smeared posters all over the windshield, and let the air out of the tires. Unable to get out, the forces of law and order sat fuming and impotent; ordinarily Van der Valk would have laughed heartily. They would simply radio for reinforcements—another instance of too little and too late. Or wagonloads of riot police with the inevitable headlines about police brutality; the dilemma was familiar by now to nearly every police force in the world.

This time, however, Van der Valk decided that the thing to do was to quell the riot without adding to its importance; but he was keenly aware that it was easier said than done. A chorus of slogans broke out, addressed to the pious memory of Che Guevara, and large stones crashed against the façade with an accompanying tinkle of broken glass; no time to imitate brave Horatius on the bridge.

He whisked back along the street and found three hesitant policemen. Four more appeared, probably as a result of calls from the police car which the children were now busily overturning. Ordinary municipal policemen with soft hats and hard sticks against a jubilant and now nasty-minded mob. Van der Valk had to intimidate the rioters; he had no choice.

He mustered his little army on the other side of the street. "Give me your pistol," he said to the nearest. "This thing loaded?" He cocked it, pointed it behind his back at the canal, and fired three shots at two-second intervals. There was a sudden silence.

Decidedly it was an improvement on blowing whistles. The crowd turned to face him, but waveringly. All at once it had thinned subtly; it was less compact. No more than a dozen weak sisters had faded off discreetly round the corner, but the mob was now quiet, staring at him, momentarily open-mouthed. The three policemen in the overturned car scrambled out as best they could and gained the steps by the door.

Van der Valk spoke sarcastically. "You shout louder—but I talk better."

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Mistake—a hostile murmur grew and spread. He gave the pistol back, pointed his arm forward in the air like Marshal Murat, and bellowed: "Charge!" Clippety-clop, he thought, heading for the steps. The group before him divided and he bounced up the steps quite pleased with himself. Now they're bumped, keep them bumped. Don't stop to chat and don't give them time to think.

"To your homes, and quick. Any hesitation and I charge you. There are girls among you. Anyone who gets hurt—their lookout."

The fringes bolted, but a solid group of fifty-odd around the dilapidated police car stood firm. A redheaded boy jumped on the radiator.

"They daren't shoot," he yelled. "Throw the pigs in the canal."

"I'll have you," snapped Van der Valk. "Forward!"

The boy jumped down lithely but was hindered by his slower companions. Van der Valk caught a suede jacket, twisted an arm, and brought his captive to a standstill. The rest had run. Inside twenty seconds nothing remained of the battlefield but a few stones and one or two jackets. The forces of law and order were puffing but triumphant. There were five captives, including a girl who twisted, howled, and tried to scratch.

"Let her go," said Van der Valk swiftly. "These three to the bureau. You others stay here and let there be no more nonsense—get that damned car on its feet."

The belated reinforcements had now appeared and two dozen policemen were standing around and looking foolish. The boy twisted suddenly in an effort to break away; the grip must have hurt him because in a fierce movement he turned and spat at the Chief Inspector; this quieted Van der Valk abruptly.

"Bureau," he said again, reaching for a handkerchief. "I'm coming too. We have to have a little talk," he added to the scornful head on a level with his own.

On the bare wooden floor of the police station the boy did not struggle when he was released, but stood looking contemptuously at a ring of ruffled, sweaty policemen.

"You are liable to the following charges," intoned the Chief Inspector formally. "Disturbance of the peace in a public place, refusal to obey an official order to disperse, damage to government property, and incitement to riot and violence. How old are you?"

"Find out."

"Papers . . . Hm, seventeen. You're a juvenile—and my pigeon." He turned to the local

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commissaire, who was looking at the three boys with an unpaternal gaze. "Your district, Chief. Up to you to prefer charges."

"Carrying any prohibited weapons? Any of you with bicycle chains or such are in r e a l trouble . . . No? Well, C h i e f Inspector, they're juveniles. You were present, so I'll leave this decision to you."

"Take their particulars and let the other two go with a severe warning, but this boy I want to see more of. With your permission I'll have him taken across to my office."

"Sit down," said Van der Valk mildly.

"No."

"As you wish." He was standing himself, and could for the first time observe the boy at leisure. Tall athletic lad, as tall and almost as wide as Van der Valk himself. Only the depth was lacking—the depth of a man of 40, heavier in the neck and shoulders, thicker in the ribs and thighs.

"We're quite well matched. You're a boxer, I'm a puncher. I've two boys your age. Which gives you youth, and me experience. We can talk. Have a cigarette."

Surprising him, the boy accepted one. He no longer looked hostile, or even sullen. On the contrary he had a sunny, placid look, with more adult assurance than childish self-assertion.

"What have we got to talk about?" the boy asked innocently.

"Why, I'm in authority over a group. So are you. We have a lot in common, including intelligence and a wish for justice. I've no desire to shout at you. If you refuse to talk, that's your privilege. We could gain understanding from one another. And then, *la paix est fort bonne de soi*, as Jean de la Fontaine remarks somewhere."

The boy thought this over.

"He says something else," he murmured calmly. "According to whether you are in power or in misery, the judgment of the court will whiten you—or blacken you." Van der Valk was brought up short.

"Ah. That's—if I'm n o t mistaken—the fable about the animals ill of the plague. What year of school are you in?"

"Last—before the university. If there still is any university."

"Social injustice is y o u r theme?"

"What else could it be? Are we on equal terms? I'm in your power; you can bully me or be fatherly, as it suits you. Threaten me with charges and make a delinquent of me. But I'm not afraid of you."

"I very much hope not. You're free to go whenever you wish. I quote you La Fontaine and you

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quote him back. That's a dialogue, a useful start. I had hoped to show you that you were mistaken to spit at me. I was doing my job—to stop a riot. But you can go now."

"By isolating and arresting the ringleader you break up the followers. Is that it?"

"Just so."

"Sheep," said the boy contemptuously. "None of them has any guts. I'd have had you in the canal—you and the other pigs."

Van der Valk burst out laughing. "What's your name?"

The boy took out his identity-card folder and threw it on the desk, from which it slid to the floor.

"I asked you your name politely. It was to call you by it, not to control your identity. That I could have had done. What can either of us lose by a little courtesy?"

"Robert."

"The animals in the fable—they were ill of the plague and they assembled to discuss what could be done. They decided to confess their sins in public. There's a pretty bitter irony in that story."

"Just so, to quote you."

"The Lion, the Tiger, and the Bear—correct me if I'm wrong—were excused, I think. What crimes could they possibly have committed? None of the other animals, after reflection, could really find anything with which to reproach themselves. Finally a Donkey confessed that he had once eaten some grass which did not belong to him. That's it, they all shouted at once, that's the reason why we all have the plague."

"And so they massacred him."

"Yes. Sounds just like society, eh? But doesn't it strike you that the donkey was rather stupid?"

"The donkey was honest."

"Is that enough, in our society? Aren't you being the donkey? You're a student, still a schoolboy. The world is not what you think it should be."

"I know that you other animals will never admit you're in the wrong. But enough donkeys can kick a lion."

"Will it help? What's your ideal?"

"What we all ask—not to be treated as mental deficients, to be admonished and lectured with a wagging finger by some fat pension pusher if we have the audacity to think for ourselves."

"And for that what will you do? Break a few more windows?"

The boy glared. "We'll build barricades, here too, if you force us to. And stay on them too. And stand up to you. You'll push us off eventually—massacre the donkeys. But that will be remembered—eventually."

Van der Valk sat on the ra-

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diator and smoked, saying nothing.

"Sooner or later you know we'll win," said the boy. "That's what you're all afraid of. Violence—but what other resource do you leave us?"

"Well," said Van der Valk at last. "The answer is complex. You won't win, not by behaving like honest but stupid donkeys. I'm a pension pusher, as you rightly say. Don't despise me for that—I may have to face heavier weapons than you used, in a cause I have little respect for; but I'm a civil servant under oath, which I can only break for grave moral need, such as you do not show me. You have ideals and perhaps more courage than I have. I wish you, personally, good fortune and success. But will you take a word of advice? Don't let idealism turn into fanaticism. I am not, myself, ready to yield to violence."

"Will you have any choice?"

"Try passive resistance. You don't lose public sympathy and you don't risk getting beaten up. I broke you up this morning. I was lucky—nobody got hurt. I admit, students haven't the temperament for passive resistance. But if you'd been, for example, barricaded inside your school, your protest would have had more weight and I'd have had more difficulty."

"Not enough of us," said the boy sadly. "Too many are scared—there are too many gutless conformists, afraid of being punished."

"That's always the trouble," agreed Van der Valk cheerfully. "But I suggest that you avoid a direct clash with the police."

"Scared?" the boy said, smiling. He had an attractive smile. His hair was dark red, wiry, handsome. I'm worse than a Dutchman, thought Van der Valk; I'm a bourgeois booby.

"Yes," he said. "The students at Lyon used a truck to charge a police cordon. They killed a commissaire named René Lacroix. He had three children. He didn't run away—he had his job to do. It might have been me."

"And it might have been me. It could be me right now—if that's what it takes. Am I free to go?"

"Completely."

"You will do nothing to me at all?"

"No—donkey. I apologize for twisting your arm. If I bumped you, that's my job. You might perhaps consider apologizing for spitting."

"I'm sorry—I lost my temper."

"What does your father do?"

"He threatens me with prison."

"I daresay he does—it's the most obstructive side of my work. I meant what does he do for a living."

"He's a municipal coun-

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cilor—Conservative Party."

"Oh, oh. Not a tiger—a bear."

As the boy prepared to leave, slinging his jacket round his shoulders, Van der Valk noticed a subtle change. He was putting on armor against the world. Here he had found a quiet man, who had made cynical jokes, who had been tactful, who had not humiliated him—but outside was a world of animals. He reassumed the air of sneering irony, of impervious ferocity, of not being a donkey. He was the tough one who stiffened an army of sheep, who would not compromise, who would not surrender. Van der Valk felt sadness.

"Robert. You're one individual. I'm another. We have to keep some things clear of our herd instincts."

"Perhaps. But if we meet again, I hit. I'm younger, I hit faster."

"Yes. But it would take a lot of hitting to wear me down. Whereas if I hit you, you'd stay hit."

"I'll remember that."

The boy was gone. Van der Valk could hear steps going two at a time down the stairs, regardless of who might be coming up. He shrugged; he had other jobs to do regarding young men and women who had the misfortune to be pronounced delinquent—"out of their parents' control," was the official phrase—by the childrens' tribunal of the city of Amsterdam.

He just hoped he would not open a paper one of these days and see a headline: *'Schoolboy Killed—Tragic Consequence of Deplorable Riots.* It was always the best who thrust themselves to the front, always the honest donkey that got eaten.

CRIMINALIMERICKS

POLICE PROCEDURAL

by D. R. BENSEN

Private eyes have their booze to get high on;
Amateurs have their hunches to try on.
We cops check M.O.'s,
And the end result shows
Routine is the thing to rely on.

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a NEW Gideon by

J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

first publication in the United States

Here is the third in J. J. Marric's (John Creasey's) new series about Gideon, the Commander of the C.I.D. (the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard)—and a perfect companion piece to the third story about Van der Valk. This Gideon story also deals with juvenile delinquency—with a gang of six teen-agers who are terrorizing the suburbs. Both Van der Valk and Gideon are policemen with hearts—hearts as big as Amsterdam and London . . .

GIDEON AND THE TEEN-AGE HOOLIGANS

by J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

THOUSANDS OF YOUNG CRIMINALS, under the polite name of juvenile delinquents, passed through the hands of the Metropolitan Police each year. Many of the police shared the general view that the juvenile delinquents were a growing problem and a greater menace than ever before.

George Gideon, Commander of the C.I.D., the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, did not altogether agree.

"There always were a lot of young toughs and there will be for a long time to come," he would remark. "They're no worse than they used to be."

"They're more vicious, more cruel," his opponents would insist.

Gideon, who saw little point in continuing to argue with those who were already convinced, usually let it pass.

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It happened that when the previous year's figures on juvenile delinquency were published, they did not make reassuring reading. On the other hand they weren't much worse than before. Gideon studied the different categories of crime, from car stealing to assault, and put the documents in his brief case, to study again at home.

He was just about to leave the office when the door burst open and Lemaitre, his chief aide, rushed in. Lemaitre was tall, scraggy, overdressed, over emphatic.

"Now what's all the excitement about?" asked Gideon.

"Perhaps you'll change your song over these teen-age hooligans," Lemaitre said breathlessly. "Six of them broke into a house in Hammersmith, beat up an old couple, and stole a couple of hundred quid. Wrecked the place, too."

"Caught em?" demanded Gideon.

"They got clean away. But a woman who lives next door saw them."

"How's the old couple?"

"They'll survive—but think what it will do to them in the future."

Gideon found himself thinking a great deal about that on the way home. His own fifteen-year-old son was sitting at a corner of the kitchen table, biting the end of his pen as he puzzled over an algebraic problem. Kate Gideon saw how preoccupied her husband was, and after supper they talked.

"What gets into youngsters to make them do it?" Kate wanted to know.

"Some have the badness born in them, and some go along with the stream," Gideon said. "I hope we get this crowd soon."

There was little news for the newspapers the next morning, so the front-page headlines carried the assault-and-vandalism story. Each showed photographs of the old couple, and there were three editorials criticizing the police for treating teen-age criminals too lightly.

The Yard was in one of its sour moods.

"Nobody loves us," Lemaitre said.

"Anything on those six?" Gideon asked.

"No."

That day, and for several of the days that followed, the London police were on the lookout for the six young criminals. A few leads came in but all petered out. The story died out in the newspapers, and soon old folk living on their own lost the edge of their nervous fear.

Among these were Joe and Ada Moss, who had a little confectionery shop in Acton. They were about to close on the Monday a week after the Hammersmith

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raid when two lads came in, asking for cigarettes.

"They looked like such *nice* lads," Ada Moss sobbed afterward.

Joe turned to get the cigarettes—and one of the lads cracked a length of metal pipe on the back of his head. Ada, in the doorway leading to the rear of the shop, opened her mouth to scream—and two more lads sprang from behind her. One clapped his hand roughly over her mouth. She thought she was going to die.

"There were six of the young swine," Lemaitre told Gideon. "Two broke in at the front and two at the back, while one stood guard in the back and one out front."

"Six," echoed Gideon.

"Same lot all right," Lemaitre said. "If we don't get them this time we'll be a laughing-stock."

"If we don't get them this time, another old couple will be beaten up soon," Gideon said.

"And if Joe Moss dies it'll be a murder job," Lemaitre added.

Three days later, a frustrated police force had to admit there was not a single positive clue. Gideon, after a lot of anxious thought, held a personal press conference.

"Someone knows these six lads," he said. "I want to appeal to the public at large to help us. If they get away with their crimes they could start a wave of violence which would lead to a great deal of pain and distress."

It was not surprising that this appeal hit the headlines; and it was not surprising that a photograph of Gideon's rugged face appeared on several front pages.

About noon, on the day these appeared, the Yard's telephone operator called Gideon and said, "There's a woman on the line asking for you. She says it's about the six youths we're after, but she won't give her name."

Gideon said, "Put her through." He motioned to Lemaitre, who picked up the extension.

"Is—is that Mr. Gideon, the Commander?" a woman asked. She sounded very timid.

Gideon's voice was gentle. "That's right. How can I help you?"

"Was it your picture in the paper this morning?"

"Yes, that's right."

"What—what will happen to those boys if you catch them?" asked the woman.

Gideon hesitated.

"Did you hear me, please?"

"Yes, ma'am. It depends on their age, of course," Gideon said. "It may be affected by circumstances, too—and if there's a ringleader—"

"Oh, I'm sure there is!"

"Can you give me his name?" asked Gideon.

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Lemaitre's pencil was poised.

"I—I'm afraid I can't," answered the woman, "but I'm sure there is one. There *must* be."

"I wonder if we can meet," Gideon said, still talking in a gentle voice.

"Oh, I—I can't make up my mind. Would—would they *all* go to prison?"

"Not necessarily."

"Or to a reform school?"

"If we could talk about this face to face, Mrs. — I didn't quite catch your name."

"Mrs. Coxon," the woman said. "I—I'll think about it. I'll telephone you again."

"Now, Mrs. Coxon, if you wait too long—" Gideon began.

But the line went dead.

"I got a feeling she really knew something," Lemaitre said disappointedly. "She's scared stiff, too."

Gideon had the receiver in his hand.

"Information? I want a call out to all divisions and subdivisions for immediate action. Information is required urgently about a Mrs. Coxon, probably aged thirty-five to fifty-five, who has at least one teen-age son," Gideon ordered. "Reports to you for sifting and sending on to me at once."

"Right, sir."

"How'd you guess her age?" demanded Lemaitre.

"Most women with a teen-age son would be in that age group," Gideon said. "And she's scared and anxious—as a mother would be if she suspected her son was mixed up in this kind of business. Look how she jumped at the idea that there must be a ringleader."

"If you ask me it's a hopeless long shot," Lemaitre said gloomily.

By mid-afternoon 18 reports had come in of a Mrs. Coxon with one or more teen-age sons. By five o'clock another 12 were reported. Gideon studied them all, and set three aside.

Lemaitre, breathing down his neck, remarked, "All widows, eh?"

"Yes."

"A woman without a man behind her would be the type to make that call," Lemaitre approved.

By half-past six, two more widow Coxons were on the list.

"Now I'm going to take a chance," Gideon said. "I'm going to call on each one."

"Me, too." Lemaitre was just as eager.

They made three calls, all in the northwestern and southwestern suburbs. In each case Gideon was quickly satisfied that they had drawn a blank. The fourth Mrs. Coxon lived with a son aged 17, in a small flat in Totteridge. It was a long drive. The house was in darkness when Gideon and Lemaitre arrived.

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They got out of the car, and as they did so, the local superintendent and a detective officer moved out of the shadows.

"I've been checking, George," the superintendent said. "Young Coxon's a bit of a rip—the big bad boy of the neighborhood. He's working now and is flush with money. We might be onto this mob."

"There's one way to find out," Gideon said. "If this is the Mrs. Coxon who telephoned, she'll give herself away when she sees me. She in?"

"No. She went to the pictures, but should be back soon."

Gideon and Lemaitre sat in the back of the car a few doors away. The local men stayed in the shadows. Now and again one or two people walked along the street, and at last a woman came alone, hurrying.

She turned into the house where Mrs. Coxon lived.

Gideon got out of the car and followed her. He banged on the front door before she could have started up the stairs. He heard her footsteps. The door opened and the dim hall light fell on his face.

"Mrs. Coxon, I am Commander Gideon," he said gently. "I would like to talk about your telephone call this morning."

She stared, as if looking upon horror, then slowly backed away. Gideon thought she would faint.

"I'm almost sure my Daniel's one of them," the woman mumbled ten minutes later. "He's with some awful louts, and—it isn't his fault, I swear it isn't. I've never known him so miserable, in spite of the money he's got. If—if it is him, what—what *will* happen? If he goes to prison I'll never forgive myself." She paused. "And if he ever finds out I was the one who gave him away—"

"If he was led into killing someone you would have much more to worry about," Gideon said. "And he need never know you telephoned."

"You won't tell him?" Hope filled her eyes.

"No," Gideon promised.

It was not long before the boy came up the stairs. His footsteps dragged and he opened the door as if it were an effort. He saw his mother first and said, "Hi, Ma."

Gideon saw his pale face and had the impression of a very frightened lad. Daniel Coxon reminded him of his own sons when they had come to him to confess some boyhood offense.

Then he saw Gideon.

"Who—" he began, and bit his lips.

"I'm from Scotland Yard," Gideon said quietly. "I want a word with you, Daniel."

"Daniel, please—please tell the gentleman the truth," Mrs. Coxon

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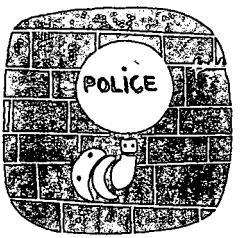
pleaded. "I'm so tired of the worry, I just can't sleep at night. Daniel—"

"Don't you think I'm tired of it?" asked her son bitterly. "If I could only get out of the gang."

"Two sixteen-year-olds, reform school. Three eighteen-year-olds, two years in the jug. The ringleader, aged nineteen, five years," Lemaitre reported a few weeks later. "Just about the right sentences, George. Good job for that bunch that none of their victims died, though. Mrs. Coxon was in court. She asked me to thank you. She says she's sure her Daniel will stick to the straight road in the future. Must say I hope she's right."

Gideon hoped so too.



CRIMINALIMERICKS

ON YOUR MARRIC

by D. R. BENSEN

With hearts hard and black as obsidian,
Gangs of crooks prowl like armies of Midian:
Smash-and-grab and assault
But they screech to a halt
At a glance from Commander George Gideon.

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A NERO WOLFE *short novel* by

REX STOUT

complete in this issue

At the beginning of the case of the dead uranium millionaire Nero Wolfe was a reluctant dragon of a detective—only because, as everyone knows, Nero Wolfe hates to work. But then the great Nero's curiosity was aroused, and when that happens Nero does go to work.

The curiosity-arouser? Two hot-water bags. But let Nero speak for himself: "It's inexplicable; and anything inexplicable on a deathbed is sinister . . . It's more than mysterious, it's preposterous."

"A Window for Death," complete in this issue, is one of Rex Stout's most baffling and most ingeniously constructed short novels. So we need hardly warn the epicures among you: beware of an appetizing plate of red herring . . . .

A WINDOW FOR DEATH

by REX STOUT

NERO WOLFE, BEHIND HIS DESK, sat glaring at the caller in the red leather chair. I was swiveled with my back to my desk, ready with my notebook, not glaring.

Wolfe's glare was partly on general principles, but more because David R. Fyfe had not phoned for an appointment. You might think it didn't matter. There was the office, on the ground floor of the old brownstone house on West 35th Street. There was Wolfe in the chair he loved, sharpening his penknife on the old oilstone he kept in a drawer. There was I, Archie Goodwin, eager to earn my pay by serving his slightest whim, within reason. There was Fritz Brenner in the

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kitchen, doing the luncheon dishes, set to bring beer if the buzzer went one short and one long. There was Theodore Horstmann up in the plant rooms on the roof, nursing the orchids. And there in the red leather chair was a guy who wanted to hire a detective or he wouldn't have come. But for him and others like him, Fritz and Theodore and I would have been out looking for jobs, and God only knows what Wolfe would have been doing. But Wolfe was glaring at him. He should have phoned for an appointment.

He sat forward in the red leather chair, not touching the back, his narrow shoulders sagging and his pale narrow face looking the worse for wear. I would have guessed his age at 50, but most people look older than they are when forced by circumstances to go to a private detective. In a tired, careful voice, after giving his name and address and his occupation—head of the English Department at Audubon High School in the Bronx—he said he wanted Wolfe to investigate a confidential family matter.

"Marital?" Wolfe made a noise that went with the glare. "No."

He shook his head. "It isn't marital. I am a widower, with two children in high school. It's about my brother Bertram—his death. He died Saturday night of pneumonia. It will have to be—I'll have to explain about it."

Wolfe sent me a glance and I met it. If he let Fyfe explain he might have to work, and he hated to work, especially when the bank balance was healthy. But I tightened my lips a little as I met his glance, and he sighed and went back to the customer. "Do so," he muttered.

Fyfe did so, and I took it down. His brother Bertram had suddenly appeared in New York a month ago, unannounced, after an absence of 20 years, and taken an apartment in the Churchill Towers, and communicated with his family—his older brother, David, who was doing the explaining, his younger brother, Paul, and his sister, Louise, now Mrs. Vincent Tuttle. They had all been glad to see him again after so many years, including Tuttle, the brother-in-law, and had also been glad to learn that he had hit a jackpot—not David's word, his was bonanza—by finding and hooking onto a four-mile lode of uranium ore near a place called Black Elbow somewhere in Canada. It is always nice to know that a member of the family has made out well.

So they had welcomed Bertram, their brother Bert, and along with him a young man named Johnny Arrow who had accompanied him from Canada and was living with him in the Churchill Towers apartment. Bert had been fairly

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fraternal and had shown an interest in old memories and associations; he had even asked Paul, who was a real-estate broker, to get a line on the purchase of the old house in Mount Kisco where they had all been born and spent their childhood. Obviously Bert was back as one of the family.

Ten days ago he had invited them to dine with him on Saturday the sixth, and afterward go to the theater, but on Thursday he had been put to bed with pneumonia. He refused to go to a hospital and insisted that they should dine at the Churchill as planned and use the theater tickets; so they gathered at his apartment late Saturday afternoon and carried out the program, returning to the apartment after the show for a champagne snack.

That is, four of them did—sister Louise and her husband, Johnny Arrow from Canada, and brother David himself. Younger brother Paul had maintained that Bert shouldn't be left alone with the nurse, and had stayed at the apartment. When the four returned after the show they found a situation. Paul had gone and the nurse had a torn uniform and marks on her neck and cheeks and wrists. She had phoned the doctor to send another nurse and intended to leave as soon as her replacement came. Sister Louise resented some of her remarks and ordered her to leave at once, and she went.

Louise phoned the doctor and told him she would stay until another nurse came. Johnny Arrow disappeared, leaving only David and Louise and her husband, Vincent Tuttle, on the scene; and after David had looked in at Bert on his sickbed, sound asleep under the morphine the nurse had given him by doctor's orders, he departed for home.

Louise and Tuttle went to bed in a room that was presumably Johnny Arrow's, but were not yet asleep when a buzz took Tuttle to the door of the apartment, where he found Paul. Paul said he had been assaulted by Johnny Arrow down in the men's bar, and had an assortment of bruises to show as evidence. Arrow had been escorted away by two cops. Paul thought his jaw was broken and possibly a rib or two, and he didn't feel like driving home to Mount Kisco, so they put him on a couch in the living room, and in thirty seconds he was snoring, and after another glance in at the door of Bert's room Louise and Tuttle went back to bed.

Around six in the morning they were aroused by Paul. He had aroused himself by tumbling off the couch, had gone to look at Bert, and had found him dead. They phoned down to the desk

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for a doctor because Bert had insisted on having the old family doctor he knew in his boyhood, and they didn't want to wait for him to get in from Mount Kisco. Of course they phoned him too, and he got there later.

Wolfe was fidgeting. He fidgets by making circles the size of a dime with a fingertip on his chair arm. "I trust," he grumbled, "that the doctors will now justify your calling on me and this long recital. Or at least one of them."

"No, sir." David Fyfe shook his head. "They found nothing wrong. My brother died of pneumonia. Dr. Buhl—that's the one from Mount Kisco, Dr. Frederick Buhl—he signed the death certificate, and my brother was buried Monday, yesterday, in the family plot. Of course the nurse having gone made the—uh—the situation a little embarrassing, but no serious question was raised."

"Then what the devil do you want of me?"

"I'm about to tell you." Fyfe cleared his throat, and when he went on his voice was more careful than ever: "After the funeral yesterday that man Arrow asked us to come to the apartment at eleven o'clock this morning to hear the will read, and of course we went. Louise brought her husband along. There was a lawyer there, a man named McNeil who had flown down from Montreal, and he had the will. It had all the usual legal rigmarole, but what it amounted to was that Bert left his whole estate to Paul and Louise and me, and made that man Arrow the executor. It put no value on the estate, but from things Bert had said I would have thought his uranium holdings were worth upwards of five million dollars, possibly twice that."

Wolfe stopped fidgeting.

"Then," Fyfe went on, "the lawyer took another document from his brief case. He said it was a copy of an agreement he had drawn up a year ago for Bertram Fyfe and Johnny Arrow. He read it. There was a preamble about their prospecting together for uranium for five years and their joint discovery of the Black Elbow lode, and the gist of it was that if either of them died the whole thing would become the property of the survivor, including any assets that had been acquired by the deceased through income from the mining property. That wasn't the phraseology, it was all very legal, but that's what it meant.

"As soon as he read it Johnny Arrow spoke up. He said that Bert had possessed nothing that had not been acquired with income from the Black Elbow uranium, and that therefore it was now legally his property, including large sums on deposit in Canadian banks, but that when Bert came to New York he had had some

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thirty or forty thousand dollars transferred to a New York bank, and he, Arrow, didn't intend to claim what was left of it. That would be the estate and we could have it."

David made a mild little gesture. "He was being generous, I thought, since he could have claimed that too. We asked the lawyer a few questions and then left and went out to a restaurant for lunch. Paul was raging. My brother Paul is impulsive. He wanted to go to the police and tell them Bert had died in suspicious circumstances and ask them to investigate. His theory was that when Arrow saw that Bert was getting reconciled with his family he was afraid he might make large gifts to us, possibly even a share of the mining properties, and Arrow couldn't claim them under the agreement if Bert died, so he decided he had to die now.

"Vincent Tuttle, my sister's husband, objected that even if the theory was sound Arrow hadn't acted on it, since two competent doctors had agreed that Bert had died of pneumonia, and Louise and I agreed with him, but Paul was stubborn. He hinted that he knew something we didn't know, but then he has always liked to be a little mysterious. He stuck to it that we should go to the police, and we argued about it, and finally I suggested a compromise. I suggested that I get Nero Wolfe to investigate, and if you decided there was sufficient reason to call in the police we would join with Paul in doing so, and if you decided there wasn't, Paul would forget it. Paul said all right, he would accept your decision, so that's what I want you to do. I know you charge high fees, but this shouldn't require any great—uh—I mean it shouldn't be too complicated. It's a fairly simple problem, isn't it?"

Wolfe grunted. "It could be. There was no autopsy?"

"No, no. Good heavens, no."

"That should be the first step, but it's too late now, without the police. Before burial an examination could have been made merely to satisfy medical curiosity, but exhumation needs authority. I take it that you want me to investigate, and reach a decision, without attracting the attention of the police."

Fyfe nodded emphatically. "That's right. That's exactly right. We don't want any scandal . . . any rumors going around . . ."

"People rarely do," Wolfe said drily. "But you may be hiring me to start one. You understand, of course, that if I find evidence of skulduggery it will not be in your sole discretion whether to bury it or disclose it. I will not engage to suppress grounds, if I find any, for a suspicion of

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homicide. If my investigation results in a reasonable assumption that you have yourself committed a crime, I am free to act as I see fit."

"Of course." Fyfe tried to smile, with fair success. "Only I know I have committed no crime, and I doubt if anyone has. My brother Paul is a little impetuous. You'll need to see him, naturally, and he'll want to see you."

"I'll have to see all of them." Wolfe's tone was morose. Work. He grabbed at a straw. "But under the circumstances I must ask for a retainer as a token of good faith. Say a check for a thousand dollars?"

It wasn't a bad try, since a head of a high-school English department with two children might not have a grand lying around loose, and the deal would have been off, but Fyfe didn't even attempt to haggle. He did gulp, and gulped again after he got out a check folder and pen and wrote, and signed his name. I got up and accepted the check when he offered it and passed it across to Wolfe.

"It's a little steep," Fyfe said—not a complaint, just a fact—"but it can't be helped. It's the only way to satisfy Paul. When will you see him?"

Wolfe gave the check a look and put it under a paperweight, a chunk of petrified wood that had once been used by a man named Duggan to crack his wife's skull. He glanced up at the wall clock; in twenty minutes it would be four o'clock—time for his afternoon session in the plant rooms.

"First," he told Fyfe, "I need to speak with Dr. Buhl. Can you have him here at six o'clock?"

David looked doubtful. "I could try. He would have to come in from Mount Kisco, and he's a busy man. Can't you leave him out of it? He certified the death and he's thoroughly reputable."

"It's impossible to leave him out. I must see him before dealing with the others. If he can be here at six, arrange for the others to come at six thirty. Your brother and sister, and Mr. Tuttle, and Mr. Arrow."

Fyfe stared. "Good heavens," he protested, "not Arrow! Anyway, he wouldn't come." He shook his head emphatically. "No. I won't ask him."

Wolfe shrugged. "Then I will. And it might be better—yes. It may be protracted, and I dine at seven thirty. If you can arrange for Dr. Buhl to be here at nine, bring the others at half-past. That will give us the night if we need it. Of course, Mr. Fyfe, there are several points I could go into with you now—for instance, the situation you found when you returned to the apartment from the theater, and your brother Bertram's reconciliation with his

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family—but I have an appointment; and besides, they can be explored more fully this evening. For the present, please give Mr. Goodwin the addresses and phone numbers of everyone involved."

He moved his vast bulk forward in his chair to pick up the penknife and start rubbing it gently on the oilstone. He had undertaken that job, and by gum he intended to finish it.

"I described the situation," Fyfe said in a sharper tone. "I invited the inference that Paul had stayed at the apartment in order to approach the nurse. I wholly disapprove of his method of approaching women. I have said he is impetuous."

Wolfe was feeling the knife's edge tenderly with a thumb.

"What is the point," Fyfe asked, "about the reconciliation?"

"Only that you used the word." Wolfe was honing again. "What needed to be reconciled? It may be irrelevant, but so are most points raised in an investigation. It can wait till this evening."

Fyfe was frowning. "It's an old sore," he said, the sharpness gone and his voice tired again. "It may not be irrelevant, because it may partly account for Paul's attitude. Also I supoose we're oversensitive about any threat of scandal. Pneumonia is a touchy subject with us. My father died of pneumonia twenty years ago, but it was thought by the police he was murdered. Not only by the police. He was in a ground-floor bedroom in our house at Mount Kisco, and it was January, and on a stormy night, extremely cold, someone raised two windows and left them wide-open. I found him dead at five o'clock in the morning. Snow was drifted a foot deep on the floor and there was snow on the bed. My sister Louise, who was caring for him that night, was sound asleep on a couch in the next room. It was thought that some hot chocolate she drank at midnight had been drugged, but that wasn't proved. The windows weren't locked and could have been opened from the outside—in fact, they must have been. My father had been a little shrewd in some of his real-estate dealings and there were people in the community who had been—uh—who were not fond of him."

Fyfe repeated the mild little gesture. "So you see, there is the coincidence. Unfortunately, my brother Bert—he was only twenty-two then—had quarreled with my father and was not living at home. He was living in a rooming house about a mile away and had a job in a garage. The police thought they had enough evidence to arrest him for murder and he was tried, but the evidence certainly wasn't conclusive, because he was acquitted. Anyhow he had an alibi. Up to two o'clock that night he had been playing

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cards with a friend—Vincent Tuttle, who later married my sister—in Tuttle's room in the rooming house, and it had stopped snowing shortly after two, and the windows must have been opened long before it stopped snowing. But Bert resented some of our testimony on the witness stand—Paul's and Louise's and mine—though all we did was tell the truth about things that were known anyway—for example Bert's quarrel with my father. Everybody knew about it. The day after he was acquitted Bert left town and we never heard from him, not a word for twenty years. So that's why I used the word 'reconciled'."

Wolfe had returned the knife to his pocket and was putting the oilstone in the drawer.

"Actually," Fyfe said, "Arrow was wrong when he stated that Bert possessed nothing that had not been acquired with income from the uranium. Bert never claimed his share of our father's estate, and they couldn't find him, and we have never applied for its distribution. His one-quarter share was around sixty thousand dollars, and now it's more than double that. Of course Paul and Louise and I will get it now, but honestly it will give me no pleasure. I may say frankly, Mr. Wolfe, that I am sorry Bert came back. It reopened an old sore, and now his death, and the way it happened, and Paul acting like this . . ."

It was one minute to four. Wolfe was pushing his chair back and leaving it. "Yes, indeed, Mr. Fyfe," he concurred. "A nuisance alive and an affliction dead. Please give Mr. Goodwin the necessary information, and phone when you have made the arrangements for this evening."

He headed for the door.

A little research into backgrounds is often a help, even in cases that apparently don't call for it, and after Fyfe left I made a few phone calls to various quarters, getting a skimpy crop of useless information. David had taught at Audubon High School for twelve years and had been head of the English Department for four. Paul's real-estate agency in Mount Kisco was no whirlwind but was seemingly solvent. Vincent Tuttle's drug store, also in Mount Kisco, was his own, and was thought to be doing fine. David had had no address or phone number for the nurse, Anne Goren, but Wolfe wanted them all, and I found her in the Manhattan book, listed as an RN. The first two times I dialed her number I got a busy signal, and the next three times no answer.

Nor could I get Johnny Arrow. Calls to the Churchill Towers go through the Churchill switchboard, and I left word for

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him to call, and made half a dozen tries. Finally, just before Fritz announced dinner, I got Tim Evarts, assistant house dick, security officer to you, and asked him a few discreet questions. The answers were both for and against. For, the rent was paid on the de luxe Towers apartment, and the bar and restaurant staff all liked Johnny Arrow, especially his tipping standards. Against, Arrow had slugged a guy in the bar Saturday night, repeatedly and persistently, and had been removed by cops. Tim said that technically it had been a fine performance, but the Churchill bar wasn't the place for it.

Fyfe had phoned that the arrangements had been made. At nine o'clock, when Dr. Frederick Buhl arrived, Wolfe and I were through in the dining room, having put away around four pounds of salmon mousse, Wolfe's own recipe, and a peck of summer salad, and were back in the office. The doorbell took me to the hall, and as I switched on the stoop light what I saw through the one-way glass panel of the front door gave me a double surprise. Dr. Buhl, if it was he, was no doddering old worn-out hick doc; he was an erect, gray-haired, well-dressed man of distinction. And with him was a young female having her own personal points of distinction, discernible even by a swift glance at a distance.

I went and opened up. He moved aside for her to enter and then followed, saying that he was Dr. Buhl and had an appointment with Nero Wolfe. No hat covered his crown of distinguished gray hair, so there was nothing for the rack, and I led them down the hall and into the office. Inside he halted to dart a glance around, then crossed to Wolfe's desk and said aggressively, "I'm Frederick Buhl. David Fyfe asked me to come. What is all this nonsense?"

"I don't know," Wolfe murmured. He keeps his voice down to a murmur after a meal, unless goaded. "I've been hired to find out. Sit down, sir. The young woman?"

"She's the nurse. Miss Anne Goren. Sit down, Anne."

She was already sitting, in a chair I had moved up for her. I was making revisions in my opinion of Paul Fyfe. Probably he had been too impetuous, but the temptation had been strong; and the marks on her neck and cheeks and wrists must have been superficial since no scars were visible. Also a nurse's uniform is much more provocative than the blue cotton print she was wearing, with a bolero jacket to match. Even in the cotton print, I could have—but skip it. She was there on business. She thanked me for the chair, coldly, no smile.

Dr. Buhl, in the red chair, demanded, "Well, what is it?"

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Wolfe murmured, "Didn't Mr. Fyfe tell you?"

"He told me that Paul thought there was something suspicious about Bert's death and wanted to go to the police, and David and Louise and Vincent Tuttle couldn't talk him out of it, and they agreed to get you to investigate and accept your decision, and he had talked with you, and you insisted on seeing me. I think it quite unnecessary. I am a reputable physician, and I signed a death certificate."

"So I understand," Wolfe murmured. "But if my decision is to be final it should be well fortified. I have no thought of challenging the propriety of your issuance of the death certificate. But there are a few questions. When did you last see Bertram Fyfe alive?"

"Saturday evening. I was there half an hour, and left at twenty minutes past seven. The others were there, having dinner in the living room. He had refused to go to a hospital. I had put him under an oxygen tent, but he kept jerking it off, he wouldn't have it. I couldn't get him to leave it on and neither could Miss Goren. He was in considerable pain, or said he was, but his temperature was down to a hundred and two. He was a difficult patient. He couldn't sleep, and I told the nurse to give him a quarter of a grain of morphine as soon as the guests had gone, and another quarter grain an hour later if that didn't work—he had had half a grain the night before."

"Then you returned to Mount Kisco?"

"Yes."

"Did you think he might die that night?"

"Of course not."

"Then when you got word Sunday morning that he was dead, weren't you surprised?"

"Of course I was." Buhl flattened his palms on the chair arms. "Mr. Wolfe, I am tolerating this as a favor to David Fyfe. You are being inane. I'm sixty years old. I've been practicing medicine for more than thirty years, and fully half of my patients have surprised me one way or another—by bleeding too much or too little, by getting a rash from taking aspirin, by refusing to show a temperature with a high blood count, by living when they should die, by dying when they should have lived. That is the universal experience of general practitioners. Yes, Bertram Fyfe's death was a surprise, but it was by no means unprecedented. I examined the body with great care a few hours after he died and found nothing whatever to make me question the cause of death. So I issued the certificate."

"Why did you examine the body with great care?" Wolfe was still murmuring.

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"Because the nurse had left him in the middle of the night—had been forced to leave—and I hadn't been able to get a replacement. The best I could do was to arrange for one to report at seven in the morning. Under those circumstances I thought it well to make a thorough examination for the record."

"And you are completely satisfied that pneumonia was the cause of death, with no contributing factors?"

"No, of course not. Complete satisfaction is a rarity in my profession, Mr. Wolfe. But I am satisfied that it was proper and correct to issue the certificate, that it was consistent with all the observable evidence, that—in layman's language—Bertram Fyfe died of pneumonia. I am not quibbling. Long ago a patient of mine died of pneumonia, but it was a cold winter night and someone had opened the windows of his room and let the storm in. But in this case it was a hot summer night and the windows were closed. The apartment was air conditioned, and I had instructed the nurse to keep the regulator at eighty in that room because a pneumonia patient needs warmth, and she had done so. In the case I mentioned, windows open to a winter storm were certainly a contributing factor, but in this case there was no evidence of any such factor."

Wolfe nodded approvingly "You have covered the point admirably, Doctor, but you have also raised one. The air conditioner. What if someone moved the regulator, after the nurse's departure, to its lowest extreme? Could it have cooled the room sufficiently to cause your patient to die when you expected him to live?"

"I would say no. I considered that possibility. Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle have assured me that they did not touch the regulator and that the room's temperature remained equable, and anyway on so hot a night the conditioner couldn't have cooled the air to that extent. I wanted to be satisfied on that point, since no nurse had been there, and I arranged with the hotel to check it Saturday night, in that room. After the regulator had been at its extreme for six hours the temperature was sixty-nine—too low for a pneumonia patient, even one well covered, but certainly not lethal."

"I see," Wolfe murmured. "You did not rely on the assurance of Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle."

Buhl smiled. "Is that quite fair? I relied on them as wholly as you rely on me. I was being thorough. I am thorough."

"An excellent habit. I have it too. Did you have any suspicion, with or without reason, that someone might have contrived to help

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the pneumonia kill your patient?"

"No. I was merely being thorough."

Wolfe nodded. "Well." He heaved a deep sigh, and when it had been disposed of turned his head to focus on the nurse. During the conversation she had sat with her back straight, her chin up, and her hands folded in her lap. I had her profile. There are not many female chins that rate high both from the front and from the side.

Wolfe spoke. "One question, Miss Goren—or two. Do you concur with all that Dr. Buhl has told me—all that you have knowledge of?"

"Yes, I do." Her voice was a little husky, but she hadn't been using it.

"I understand that while the others were at the theater Paul Fyfe made advances to you which you repulsed. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Did that cause you to neglect your duties in any way? Did it interfere with your proper care of your patient?"

"No. The patient was sound asleep, under sedation."

"Have you any comment or information to offer? I have been hired by David Fyfe to determine whether anything about his brother's death warrants a police inquiry. Can you tell me anything whatever that might help me decide?"

Her eyes left him to go to Buhl, then came back again. "No, I can't," she said. She stood up. Of course nurses are expected to rise from a chair without commotion, but she just floated up. "Is that all?"

Wolfe didn't reply, and she moved. Buhl got to his feet. But when she was halfway to the door Wolfe called, considerably above a murmur, "Miss Goren, one moment!" She turned to look at him. "Sit down, please?" he invited her.

She hesitated, glanced at Buhl, and came back to the chair. "Yes?" she asked.

Wolfe regarded her briefly, then turned to Buhl. "I could have asked you before," he said, "why you brought Miss Goren. It seemed quite unnecessary, since you were fully prepared and qualified to deal with me, and surely it was inconsiderate to drag her into a matter so delicate. It was a reasonable inference that you expected me to ask some question that she could answer and you couldn't, so you had to have her with you. Evidently I didn't ask it, but I did provoke her. When I asked if she could tell me anything she looked at you. Manifestly she is withholding something and you know what it is. I can't pump it out of you, with no bribe to offer and no threat to brandish, but my curiosity has been aroused and must somehow be satisfied. You

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may prefer to satisfy it yourself."

Buhl, his elbow on the chair arm, was pulling at his fine straight nose with a thumb and forefinger. He let his hand drop. "You're not just a windbag," he said. "You're quite correct. I expected you to bring up something that would require Miss Goren's presence, and I'm astonished that you didn't. I wanted to consider it, but I'm perfectly willing to bring it up myself. Haven't they mentioned the hot-water bags to you?"

"No, sir. I have been told nothing about hot-water bags."

"Then I suppose Paul—but it doesn't matter what I suppose. Tell him about it, Anne."

"He already knows about it," she said scornfully. "One of them hired him."

"Tell me anyway," Wolfe suggested, "for comparison." His method with women is neither Paul's nor mine.

"Very well." Her lovely chin was up. "I was keeping two hot-water bags on the patient, one on each side of his chest, and changing the water every two hours. I changed it just before I left—before Mrs. Tuttle ordered me to leave. Sunday evening Paul Fyfe came to my apartment—I have a little apartment on Forty-eighth Street with a friend, another nurse. He said that when he found his brother was dead that morning he pulled the covers down and the hot-water bags were there, but they were empty, and he took them and put them in the bathroom. Later his sister, Mrs. Tuttle, saw them and called him to look at them and said the nurse had neglected to fill them, and she was going to report it to the doctor. He asked if she hadn't changed the water herself before she went to bed, and she said no, she hadn't thought it was necessary because the nurse had changed it just before she left."

Miss Goren's voice wasn't husky now. It was clear and firm and positive. "He said he had told his sister that when he took the bags to the bathroom he had emptied the water out of them. He said he told her that on the spur of the moment, to keep her from reporting me to the doctor, but he had realized since that perhaps he shouldn't have told her that because the empty bags might have had something to do with his brother's death, and he asked me to go and have dinner with him so we could talk it over. We were standing at the door of the apartment, I hadn't let him in, and I slammed the door in his face. The next day, yesterday, he phoned three times, and last evening he came to the apartment again, but I didn't open the door. So he told his brother David and got him to come to you. How does it compare?"

Wolfe was frowning at her.

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"Pfui," he said, and gave her up and turned to Buhl. "So that's it," he growled.

Buhl nodded. "Miss Goren phoned to tell me about it Sunday evening, and again yesterday, and again last night. Naturally, since her professional competence was in question. Do you wonder that I expected you to bring it up?"

"No, indeed. But I hadn't heard of it. How much chance is there that Miss Goren did in fact fail to put water in the bags?"

"None whatever, since she says she put it in. She trained at the Mount Kisco Hospital, and I know her well. I always use her, if she's available, when I have a patient in New York. That can be eliminated."

"Then either Paul Fyfe is lying or someone took the bags from the bed, emptied them, and put them back. Which seems senseless. Certainly it could have had no appreciable effect on the patient. Could it?"

"No. Appreciable, no." Buhl passed a palm over his distinguished gray hair. "But it could have an effect on Miss Goren's professional reputation, and I feel some responsibility. I put her on the case. You haven't asked me for an opinion, but I offer one. I think Bertram Fyfe died of pneumonia, with no contributing factors except those he contributed himself—his refusal to the oxygen tent, perhaps his capricious insistence on having them come to dinner despite his illness. He was a headstrong boy, and apparently he never changed. As for the hot-water bags I think Paul Fyfe is lying. I don't want to slander him, but the vagaries of his conduct with women are common knowledge in his home community. A woman who strikes his fancy doesn't merely attract him; he is obsessed. It would be consonant with his former known behavior if, seeing the bags in the bed, he had formed the notion of acquiring a weapon to use on Miss Goren and took the bags to the bathroom and emptied them."

"Then," Wolfe objected, "he was an ass to tell his sister he had emptied them."

Buhl shook his head. "Only to sidetrack her. He could tell Miss Goren he had done her that service and at the same time could threaten, at least tacitly, to disclose her negligence. I don't say he wasn't an ass; obsessed people usually are. I merely say that I think he told his sister the truth and told Miss Goren a lie. I think he emptied the bags himself. I understand he will be here this evening, with the others, and I ask you to let them know that any attempt to charge Miss Goren with an act of negligence will be deeply resented by me and strongly opposed. I will advise her to bring an action for

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slander and I will support it. If you prefer that I tell them myself—"

The doorbell rang. I got up and went to the hall for a look, and stepped back in.

"They're here," I told Wolfe. "David and two men and a woman."

He looked up at the clock. "Ten minutes late. Bring them in."

"No!" Anne Goren was on her feet. "I won't! I won't be in a room with them! Dr. Buhl, please!"

I must say I agreed with her. I wasn't obsessed, but I absolutely agreed. After a second's hesitation Buhl did too, and told Wolfe so. Wolfe looked at her and decided to make it unanimous.

"All right," he conceded. "Archie, take Miss Goren and Dr. Buhl to the front room, and after the others are in here let them out."

"Yes, sir." As I went to open the door to the front room the bell rang again. Paul being impetuous. If he had known who was there he would probably have bounded through the glass panel.

The way it looked to me, as I sat at my desk and got out my notebook after ushering the newcomers in and letting Buhl and Anne Goren out, an investigation of a death that had surprised the doctor was about to deteriorate into an inquiry about a real-estate agent's methods of courtship—not the sort of job that Wolfe would ever consider worthy of his genius, fee or no fee, and I was looking forward to it.

In appearance Paul was not up to his billing. He was a good eight inches shorter than me, broad and a little pudgy, and probably thought he looked like Napoleon—and maybe he did a little; or would have without the shiner (left eye) and the bruises on both sides of his swollen jaw. Evidently Johnny Arrow used both fists. Paul and the Tuttles were on chairs lined up in front of Wolfe's desk, leaving the red leather chair to David.

Louise was taller than either of her brothers, and better-looking. For a middle-aged woman she wasn't a bad sight at all, though a little bony, and her hair was too short. As for her husband, Tuttle, he was simply short of hair. His shiny dome, rising to a peak, made such details as eyes and nose and chin unimportant. You had to concentrate to take them in.

When I came back and sat after letting Buhl and Anne Goren out, Wolfe was speaking. ". . . and Dr. Buhl stated that in his opinion your brother died of pneumonia, with no suspicious circumstances. Since he had already certified the death, that leaves us where we

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were." He focused on Paul. "I understand that you maintain that the police should be asked to investigate. Is that correct?"

"Yes. You're damn right it is." He had a baritone and gave it plenty of breath.

"And the others disagree." Wolfe's head moved. "You disagree, sir?"

"As I told you." David looked and sounded tireder than ever. "Yes, I disagree."

"And you, Mrs. Tuttle?"

"I certainly do." She was a word clipper, with a high thin voice. "I don't believe in asking for trouble. Neither does my husband." Her head jerked sideways. "Vince?"

"That's right, my dear," Tuttle rumbled. "I always agree with you, even when I don't. This time I do."

Wolfe went back to Paul. "Then it seems to be up to you. If you go to the police what do you tell them?"

"I tell them plenty." The ceiling light made Paul's shiner look worse than it really was. "I tell them that when Dr. Buhl left Saturday evening he told us that Bert's condition was satisfactory and we could go and enjoy the play, and a few hours later Bert was dead. I tell them that that guy Arrow was making a play for the nurse, and she was giving him the eye, and he could have had an opportunity to get at her stuff and substitute something for the morphine she was going to shoot into Bert. Dr. Buhl told us he was giving morphine. I tell them that Arrow stands to rake in several million bucks that he never would have got a smell of as long as Bert was alive. I tell them that Arrow saw that Bert was getting on with us, one of the family again, and he didn't like it and showed he didn't."

Paul stopped to press gently at his jaw with fingertips. "It hurts me to talk," he said "That damn hoodlum. Look, I'm no prince. The way you're looking at me, you might be asking am I my brother's keeper, and hell no. I didn't get along any too well with Bert when we were kids, and I hadn't seen him for twenty years, so what. I might as well tell you what. A murderer can't collect on his crime, and if Arrow killed him that agreement is out the window and it will all be in Bert's estate, and it will be ours. That's obvious, so why not say it? I won't have to tell the police that because they'll know it."

"That's no way to talk, Paul," David said sharply.

"That's right," Tuttle agreed. "It certainly isn't."

"Oh, can it," Paul told his brother-in-law. "Who are you?"

"He's my husband," Louise snapped at him. "He could teach you a lot of things if you were teachable."

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All in the family. Wolfe took over. "I concede," he told Paul, "that you might stir the police into curiosity, but surmise is not enough. Have you anything else to tell them?"

"No. I don't need anything else."

"For me you do." Wolfe leaned back, pulled in a bushel of air, and let it out again. "Let's see if we can find something. What time did you arrive at your brother's apartment Saturday evening?"

"Saturday afternoon around five o'clock." The bottom half of Paul's face was suddenly contorted, and I thought he was having a spasm until I realized he was merely trying to grin, which is a problem with a sore jaw. "I get it," he said, "where was I at nine minutes to six on August sixth? Okay. I left Mount Kisco at a quarter to four, alone in my car, and drove to New York. My first stop was at Schramm's on Madison Avenue to buy two quarts of their mango ice cream to take back to Mount Kisco for a Sunday party. Then I drove to Fifty-second Street and parked the car, which can be done on a Saturday afternoon, and walked to the Churchill, arriving at the apartment a little after five. I went early because I had spoken with the nurse on the phone and liked her voice, and I thought I might get acquainted with her before the others came. Not a chance. That guy Arrow had her in the living room, telling her about prospecting for uranium. Every ten minutes or so she would sneak in for a look at her patient and then come back for more about prospecting. Then Dave came, and then Louise and Vince, and we were just starting dinner around a quarter to seven when Dr. Buhl came. Want more?"

"You might as well finish."

"Anything you say. Buhl was in with Bert about half an hour and when he left—I told you what he told us. We not only ate, we drank, and maybe I overdid it a little. I thought it wouldn't be right to leave the nurse alone with Bert, and when the others left to go to the show I stayed. I thought if the nurse liked to hear about prospecting she might like to hear about other things too, but apparently not. After a little—oh, some remarks back and forth—she went in Bert's room and shut the door and locked it. She told my sister later that I banged on the door and yelled at her that if she didn't come out I'd break the door down, but I don't remember it that way. Anyhow, by that time Bert was dead to the world with morphine, if it was morphine. She did come out, and we talked and I may have touched her, but the marks on her that she showed them when they got back from the

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theater—she must have done that herself. I wasn't that drunk, I was just a little high. Finally she got at the phone and said if I didn't leave she would call down to the desk and tell them to send someone up, and I beat it. Want more?"

"Go ahead."

"Righto. I went down to the bar and sat at a table and had a drink. Two or three drinks. Something made me remember the ice cream I had put in the refrigerator in the apartment, and I was deciding whether to go up and get it when suddenly Arrow was there telling me to stand up. He grabbed my shoulder and yanked me up and told me to put up my hands and then he hauled off and socked me. I don't know how many times he hit me, but look at me. Finally they blocked him off and a cop came.

"I edged out of the bar and took an elevator up to the apartment, and Vince let me in. That part is a little hazy, but I know they put me on a couch because I woke up by falling off it, only I wasn't really awake. I had some kind of idea about being hurt and wanting to see the nurse, and I went to Bert's room and on in. The window curtains were drawn, and I turned on a light and went to the bed. He looked dead, with his mouth open, and I pulled the covers down and felt for his heart and he felt dead. There were two hot-water bags there, one on each side of him. They looked empty, and I picked one up and it *was* empty, and I thought to myself, she was careless because I made her sore and that won't do, and the other one was empty too, and I took them to the bathroom before I went—"

"Paul!" It was Louise, staring at him. "You told me you emptied them!"

"Sure I did." He grinned at her, or tried to. "I didn't want you to report her to the doctor. What the hell, can't a man be gallant?" He returned to Wolfe. "You said I had to tell you something else. Okay, that's something else. Like it?"

"So you lied to Louise," Tuttle rumbled.

"Or you're lying now," David said, not tired at all "You have said nothing about this to me."

"Of course not. Damn it, I was being gallant."

They all pitched in, cawing at one another, all in the family. With Louise's high soprano, Paul's baritone, Tuttle's rumble, and David's falsetto, it made quite a quartette.

Wolfe shut his eyes and tightened his lips, took it up to a point, and then crashed the sound barrier. "Jabber! Stop it, please." He picked on Paul. "You, sir, speak of gallantry. I didn't mention that Miss Goren was here

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with Dr Buhl. She was, and she told me of your visits to her apartment and your phone calls, so we'll leave gallantry out, but there are two points at issue. First, the fact: did you find the bags empty or did you empty them?"

"I found them empty. I told my sister—"

"I know what you told your sister, and the reason you give. Taking it that you found the bags empty, surely it is frivolous to offer that as an item for the police. Dr. Buhl told me that even if Miss Goren neglected to put hot water in them, which he doesn't believe, it would have had no appreciable effect on the patient, so it has no appreciable effect on me. That is the second point. But your conjecture that something was substituted for the morphine—that might indeed have an effect if you can give it any support. Can you?"

"I don't have to. Let the police see if they can."

"No. That won't do. A conjecture is well enough for private exploration, but using it to put a man under official suspicion of homicide is inadmissible. For example, it would not be a fatuous conjecture if I guessed that you, not knowing of the agreement between your brother and Mr. Arrow, and assuming that you would inherit a third of his fortune, killed him; but certainly I would not proceed—"

"You'd better not," Paul cut in. "I did know about the agreement."

"Yes? Who told you?"

"I did," David said. "Bert told me and I told Paul and Louise."

"You see?" Wolfe turned a hand over. "There goes my conjecture. If I were stubborn I could of course still cling to it, guessing that you had anticipated it and conspired to meet it, knowing that your dead brother can't testify, but that would be witless if I had no single fact in support." He shook his head at Paul. "I'm afraid you're trying to open fire without ammunition. But I have been engaged to investigate, so I won't scrimp it." He went to David. "I know how you feel about this, Mr. Fyfe, so I don't expect anything significant from you, but a few questions won't hurt. What do you know about the morphine?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all, except that Dr. Buhl told us he had left some with the nurse to be given to Bert after we left."

"Did you go in your brother's room after Dr. Buhl left?"

"Yes, we all did—Paul and Louise and Vincent and I. We told him the dinner was excellent and we were sorry he couldn't be with us at the theater."

"Where was Mr. Arrow?"

"I don't know. I believe he had said something about changing his shirt."

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"Did he go in your brother's room after Dr. Buhl left?"

"I don't know." David shook his head. "I'm sure I don't know."

Wolfe grunted. "Not that that would indict him. How about later, when you returned from the theater? Did he go in your brother's room then?"

"I don't think so. If he did I didn't see him." David was frowning. "I told you about the situation. The nurse was very upset and said she had phoned Dr. Buhl to send a replacement. When she told us what had happened Arrow left—that is, he left the apartment. Then my sister and the nurse had some words and my sister told the nurse to go, and after she went my sister phoned Dr. Buhl and told him she and her husband would stay until a replacement came. Shortly after that I went home. I live in Riverdale."

"But before leaving you went to your brother's room?"

"Yes."

"How was he then?"

"He was sound asleep, making some noise breathing, but he seemed all right. When Louise phoned Dr. Buhl he told her that Bert had had half a grain of morphine and would probably not wake before morning."

Wolfe's head moved. "Mrs. Tuttle. You have heard what your brothers have said. Have you any corrections or additions?"

She was having a little trouble. Her mouth was working and her hands, in her lap, were clasped tight. She met Wolfe's look but didn't reply, until suddenly she cried, "It's not my fault! No one is going to blame it on me!"

Wolfe made a face. "Why should they, madam?"

"Because they did about my father! Do you know about my father?"

"I know how he died. Your brother told me."

"Well, they b l a m e d me then—everybody did! Because I was taking care of him and I slept and didn't go to his room and find the open windows! They even asked me if I put a drug in my chocolate so I would sleep! A t w e n t y - four-year-old girl doesn't have to take drugs to sleep!"

"Now, my dear." Tuttle patted her shoulder. "That's all in the past, it's all forgotten. There were no open windows in Bert's room Saturday night."

"But I sent the nurse away." She was talking to Wolfe. "And I told Dr. Buhl I would be responsible, and I went to bed and went to sleep without even looking at the hot-water bags, and they were empty." She jerked her head around to her y o u n g e r brother. "Tell the truth, Paul, the real truth. Were the bags empty?"

He patted her too. "Take it easy, Lou. Sure they were empty,

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on my word of honor as a Boy Scout, but that didn't kill him and I never said it did."

"No one's blaming you," Tuttle assured her. "As for your going to sleep, why shouldn't you? It was after one o'clock, and Dr. Buhl had said Bert would sleep all night. Believe me, my dear, you're making a mountain out of a molehill."

Her head went down and her hands came up to cover her face and her shoulders began to tremble. To Wolfe a lady in distress is a female having a fit, and if she starts yowling he gets to his feet faster than seems practical for his bulk and makes for the door and the elevator. Louise wasn't yowling. He eyed her sharply and warily for a moment, decided she probably wouldn't go off, and went to her husband.

"About going to sleep,- Mr. Tuttle, you said after one o'clock. That was after Paul had got you out of bed to let him in?"

"Yes." He had a soothing hand on his wife's arm. "It took a little time, hearing what Paul had to say and getting him settled on the couch. Then we took a look in Bert's room and found him asleep, and went to bed."

"Did you sleep right through until Paul woke you around six in the morning?"

"I think my wife did. She was tired out. She may have stirred a little, but I don't think she awoke. I went to the bathroom a couple of times, I usually do during the night, but except for that I slept until Paul called us. The second time I went and opened the door of Bert's room, and didn't hear anything, so I didn't go in. Why? Is this important?"

"Not especially." Wolfe darted a glance at Louise, alert to danger, and back at him. "I am thinking of Mr. Arrow and trying to cover all the possibilities. Of course he had a key to the apartment, so might have entered during the night, performed an errand if he had one, and left again. Might he not?"

Tuttle considered. To watch him consider I had to make an effort to forget his shiny dome and concentrate on his features. It would have been simpler if his eyes and nose and mouth had been on top of his head. "Possibly," he conceded, "but I doubt it. I'm not a very sound sleeper and I think I would have heard him. And he would have had to go through the living room and Paul was there on the couch, but of course Paul was pretty well gone."

"I was *all* gone," Paul asserted. "He would have had to slug me again if he wanted me to notice him." He looked at Wolfe. "It's an idea. What kind of an errand?"

"No special kind. I'm merely asking questions. —Mr. Tuttle,

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when did you next see Mr. Arrow?"

"That morning, Sunday morning, he came to the apartment around nine o'clock, just after Dr. Buhl arrived."

"Where had he been?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask him and he didn't say. It was—well, it was in the presence of death. He asked us a great many questions, some of them impertinent, I thought, but under those circumstances I made allowances."

Wolfe leaned back, closed his eyes, and lowered his chin. The brothers sat and looked at him. Tuttle turned to his wife, smoothing her shoulder and murmuring to her, and before long she uncovered her face and lifted her head. He got a nice clean handkerchief from his breast pocket, and she took it and dabbed around with it. There was no sign of any tear gullies down her cheeks.

Wolfe opened his eyes and moved them from left to right and back again. "I see no likely advantage," he pronounced, "in keeping you longer. I had hoped it would be possible to reach a decision this evening"—he leveled at Paul—"but your conjecture about the morphine merits a little inquiry—by me, that is, and of course discreet. It would be no service to expose you to an action for slander."

His eyes went to David and back across to Tuttle. "By the way, I haven't mentioned that Dr. Buhl asked me to let you know that if Miss Goren is charged with negligence he will advise her to bring such an action, and he will support it. She maintains that before she left she put hot water in the bags and he believes her. You will hear further from me, probably not later than —"

The doorbell rang. When we have company in the office Fritz usually answers it, but I had a hunch, which I frequently do, and I got up and, passing behind the customers' chairs, reached the hall in time to head Fritz off on his way to the front. The stoop light was on and through the panel I saw a stranger—a square-shouldered specimen about my age and nearly my size. Telling Fritz I'd take it, I went and opened the door to the extent allowed by the chain of the bolt and asked through the crack, "Can I help you?"

A soft drawly voice slipped through. "I guess so. My name's Arrow. Johnny Arrow. I want to see Nero Wolfe. If you open the door that'll help."

"Yeah, but I'll have to ask him. Hold it a minute." I shut the door, got a piece of paper from my pocket and wrote Arrow on it, returned to the office, crossed to Wolfe's desk, and handed him the paper. The visitors were out of their chairs, ready to leave.

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Wolfe glanced at the paper. "Confound it," he grumped. "I thought I was through for the day. But perhaps I can—very well."

I will concede that I can be charged with negligence, since I knew what had happened Saturday night in the Churchill bar, but I deny that it was intentional. I have as much respect for the furniture in the office as Wolfe has, or Fritz. I just didn't stop to consider, as I went to the front door and let the uranium prince in and ushered him to the office and stepped aside to observe expressions on faces. When, the instant he caught sight of Paul Fyfe, Arrow went for him I was too far away and therefore one of the yellow chairs got busted. The consolation was that I saw a swell demonstration of how Paul had got his jaw bruised on both sides.

Arrow jabbed with his left, hard enough to rock him off balance, and then swung his right and sent him some six feet crashing onto the chair. As he was reaching to yank him up, presumably to attend to the other eye, I got there and put my arm around his neck from behind, and my knee in his back. Tuttle was there, trying to grab Arrow's sleeve. David was circling around, apparently with the notion of getting in between them, which is rotten tactics. Louise was making shrill noises.

"Okay," I told them, "just back off. I've got him locked." Arrow tried to wriggle, found that the only question was which would snap first, his neck or his back, and quit. Wolfe spoke, disgusted, saying they had better go. Paul had scrambled to his feet and for a second I thought he was going to take a poke at Arrow while I held him, but David had his arm, pulling him away. Tuttle went to Louise and started her out, and David got Paul moving.

At the door to the hall David turned to protest to Wolfe. "You shouldn't have let him in, you might have known." When they were all in the hall I unlocked Arrow and went to see them out, and as they crossed the threshold I wished them good night, but only David wished me one in return.

Back in the office Johnny Arrow was sitting in the red leather chair, working his head gingerly forward and back to check on his neck. I may have been a little thorough, but with a complete stranger how can you tell?

I sat with my back to my desk and took him in as an object with assorted points of interest. He was a uranium millionaire, the very newest kind. He was a chronic jaw-puncher, no matter where. He knew a good-looking nurse when he saw one, and acted accordingly. And he had been nom-

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inated as a candidate for the electric chair. Quite a character for one so young. He wasn't bad-looking himself, unless you insist on the kind they use for cigarette ads. His face and hands weren't as rough and weathered as I would have expected of a man who had spent five years in the wilderness pecking at rocks, but since finding Black Elbow he had had time to smooth up some.

He quit working his head and returned my regard with a stare of curiosity from brown eyes that had wrinkles at their corners from squinting for uranium. "That was quite a squeeze," he said in his soft drawl, no animosity. "I thought my neck was broken."

"It should have been," Wolfe told him severely. "Look at that chair."

"Oh, I'll pay for the chair." He got a big roll of lettuce from his pants pocket. "How much?"

"Mr. Goodwin will send you a bill." Wolfe was scowling. "My office is not an arena for gladiators. You came, I suppose, in response to the message we left for you?"

He shook his head. "I didn't get any message. If you sent it to the hotel I haven't been there since morning. What did it say?"

"Just that I wanted to see you."

"I didn't get it." He lifted a hand to massage the side of his neck. "I came because *I* wanted to see *you.*" He emphasized a word by stretching it. "I wanted to see that Paul Fyfe too, but I didn't know he was here, that was just luck. I wanted to see him about a trick he tried to work on a friend of mine. You know about the hot-water bags."

Wolfe nodded. "And me?"

"I wanted to see you because I understand you're fixing it up that I killed my partner, Bert Fyfe." The brown eyes had narrowed a little. Evidently they squinted at other things besides uranium. "I wanted to ask if you needed any help."

Wolfe grunted. "Your information is faulty, Mr. Arrow. I have been hired to investigate and decide whether any of the circumstances of Mr. Fyfe's death warrant a police inquiry, and for that I do need help. There is no question of 'fixing it up,' as you put it. Of course your offer of help was ironic, but I do need it. Shall we proceed?"

Arrow laughed. No guffaws; just an easy little chuckle that went with the drawl. "That depends on how," he said. "Proceed how?"

"With an exchange of information, I need some and you may want some. First, I assume that you got what you already have from Miss Goren. If I'm wrong, correct me. You must have talked with her since four o'clock this afternoon. No doubt she thought she was reporting events ac-

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curately, but if she gave you the impression that I'm after you with malign intent she was wrong. Do you care to tell me whether the information that brought you here came from Miss Goren?"

"Certainly it did. She had dinner with me. Dr. Buhl came to the restaurant for her to bring her here."

If I'm giving the impression that he was eager to cooperate with Wolfe I am wrong. He was merely bragging. He was jumping at the chance to tell somebody, anybody, that Miss Goren had let him buy her a dinner.

"Then," Wolfe said, "you should realize that her report was *ex parte*, though I don't say she deliberately colored it. I will say this, and will have it typed and sign it if you wish, that so far I have found no shred of evidence to inculpate you with regard to Bertram Fyfe's death. Let's get on to facts. What do you know about the hot-water bags? Not what anyone has told you, not even Miss Goren, but what do you know from your own observation?"

"Nothing whatever. I never saw them."

"Or touched them?"

"Of course not. Why would I touch them?" The drawl never accelerated. "And if you're asking because that Paul Fyfe says he found them empty, what has that got to do with facts?"

"Possibly nothing. I'm not a gull. When did you last see Bertram Fyfe alive?"

"Saturday evening, just before we left to go to the theater. I went in just for a minute."

"Miss Goren was there with him?"

"Yes, of course."

"You didn't go in to see him when you returned from the theater?"

"No. Do you want to know why?"

"I already know. You found what Mr. David Fyfe calls a situation, and you went out again, abruptly. I have inferred that you went to look for Paul Fyfe. Is that correct?"

"Sure, and I found him. After what Miss Goren told us I would have spent the night finding him, but I didn't have to. I found him down in the bar."

"And assaulted him."

"Sure I did. I wasn't looking for him to shine his shoes." The easy little chuckle rippled out, pleasant and peaceful. "I guess I ought to be glad a cop stepped in because I was pretty mad." He looked at me with friendly interest. "That was quite a squeeze you gave me."

"What then?" Wolfe asked. "I understand you didn't return to the apartment."

"I sure didn't. Another cop got mad. They put handcuffs on me and one of them took me

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to a station house and locked me up. I wouldn't tell them who it was I had hit or why I hit him, and I guess they were trying to find him to make a charge. Finally they let me use a phone and I got someone to send a lawyer to the apartment and found that Paul Fyfe there, and that Tuttle and his wife, and Bert was dead. That doctor was there too."

"Of course it was a shock to find him dead."

"Yes, it was. It wouldn't have been if I had killed him, is that it?" Johnny Arrow chuckled. "If you're really straight on this, if you're not trying to fix me up, let me tell you something, mister. Bert and I had been knocking around together for five years, some pretty rough going. We never starved to death, but we came close to it. Nobody ever combed our hair for us. When we found Black Elbow it took a lot of hard fast work to sew up the claims, and neither of us could have swung it alone. That was when we had a lawyer put our agreement in writing, so if something happened to one of us there wouldn't be some outsiders mixing in and making trouble. It had got so we liked to be together, even when we rubbed. That was why I came to New York with him when he asked me to. There was nothing in New York I wanted. We could handle all our business matters in Black Elbow and Montreal. I sure didn't come here with him to kill him."

Wolfe was regarding him steadily. "Then he didn't come to New York on business?"

"No, sir. He said it was a personal matter. After we got here he got in touch with his sister and brothers, and I had the idea something was eating him from away back. He went to Mount Kisco a few times and took me along. We rode all around the place in a Cadillac. We went to the house where he was born and went all through it—there's an Italian family living there now. We went and had ice cream sodas at Tuttle's drugstore. We went to see a woman that ran a rooming house he had lived in once, but she had gone years ago. Just last week he found out she was living in Poughkeepsie and we drove up there."

It took him quite a while to get that much out because he never speeded up. "I seem to be talking a lot," he said, "but I'm talking about Bert. For five years I didn't do much talking except to him, and now I guess I want to talk *about* him."

He cocked his head to consider a moment, and then went on. "I wouldn't want to be fixed up, and I wouldn't want to fix anyone else up, but I guess that was too vague what I said about something eating Bert from away back. He told me a little about

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it when we were sitting under a rock one day up in Canada. He said if we really hit it he might go back home and attend to some unfinished business. Do you know how his father died and how he was tried for murder?"

Wolfe said he did.

"Well, he told me about it. He said he had never claimed his share of the inheritance because he didn't want any part of the mess he had run away from, and if you knew Bert that wouldn't surprise you. He said he had always kidded himself that he had rubbed it out and forgotten it, but now that it looked as if we might hit big he was thinking he might go back and look around. And that's what he did. If he had anyone in particular in mind he never told me, but I noticed a few things. When he told his family what he was doing he watched their faces. When he told them he was getting a complete transcript of the testimony at his trial for murder they didn't like it. When he told them he had been to see the woman that ran the rooming house they didn't like that either. It looked to me as if he was trying to give them an itch to scratch."

His eyes narrowed a little, showing crinkles. "But don't get the idea I'm trying to fix anybody up. The doctor says Bert died of pneumonia, and I guess he's a good doctor. I just didn't want to leave it vague about why Bert came to New York. Got any more questions?"

Wolfe shook his head. "Not at the moment. Later perhaps. But I suggested an exchange of information. Do you want any?"

"Now I call that polite." Arrow sounded as if he really appreciated it. "I guess not." He rose from the chair and stood a moment. "Only you said you've found no evidence to—what was that word?"

"Inculpate."

"That's it. So why don't you just move out? That's what Bert and I did when we found a field was dead, we moved out."

"I didn't say it was dead." Wolfe was glum. "It's not, and that's the devil of it. There is one mysterious circumstance that must somehow be explained before I can move out."

"What is it?"

"I've already asked you about it and you dispute it. If I broach it again with you I'll be better armed. Mr. Goodwin will send you a bill for the chair when we know the amount. Good evening, sir."

He wanted more about the mysterious circumstance, but didn't get it. Nothing doing. When he found the field was dead he moved out, and I went to the hall to open the door for him. After he crossed the sill he turned. "That sure was a squeeze."

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In the office Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed, frowning. I stowed the broken chair in a corner, put the others back in place, straightened up my desk for the night, locked the safe, then approached him. "What's the [redacted] trying to make him mad? There's a mysterious circumstance. I must have been asleep. Name it."

He muttered, without opening his eyes, "Hot-water bags."

I stretched and yawned. "I see. You force yourself to go to work, find there is no problem, and make one up. Forget it. Settle for the grand, which isn't too bad for eight hours' work, and vote no. Case closed."

"I can't. There is a problem." His eyes opened. "Who in the name of heaven emptied those bags, and why?"

"Paul did. Why not?"

"Because I don't believe it. Disregarding his repeated declarations here this evening, though they were persuasive, consider the scene. He enters his brother's room and finds him dead. He pulls the covers down and finds the hot-water bags empty. He turns to go and call his sister and brother-in-law, but it occurs to him that the empty bags are a weapon that may be used on Miss Goren. He doesn't want them to come to his sister's attention, so before he calls her he puts the bags in the bathroom. You accept that as credible?"

"Certainly I do, but—"

"If you please. I'll use the 'but.' But try it this way. He enters his brother's room and finds him dead. He pulls the covers down to feel the heart. The bags are there, with water in them. Seeing them he conceives a stratagem—and remember, he is under the shock of just having found a corpse where he expected, presumably, to find his living brother. He conceives, on the spot, before calling the others, the notion of taking the bags to the bathroom and emptying them, so he can go at some future time to Miss Goren and tell her he found them empty; and he proceeds to do so. Do you accept that as credible?"

"It's a little fancy," I admitted, "as you describe it."

"I describe it as it must have happened, *if* it happened. I say it didn't. He noticed the bags only because they *were* empty; if they had been full he probably wouldn't have been aware of them at all, there in a sickbed, now a deathbed. Doubtless there are men capable of so sly an artifice at such a moment, but he is not one of them. I am compelled to assume that he found the bags empty, and where does that leave me?"

"I'd have to look it over." I sat down.

"You won't like it." He was

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bitter. "I don't. If I am to preserve my self-esteem, a duty that cannot be delegated, I have got to explore it. Is Miss Goren at fault? Did she put the bags in the bed empty?"

"No, sir. I'm thinking of marrying her. Besides, I don't believe it. She's competent, and no competent trained nurse could possibly pull such a boner."

"I agree. Then here we are. Around midnight, just before she left, Miss Goren filled the bags with hot water and put them in the bed. Around six in the morning Paul Fyfe found the bags there in the bed, but they were empty. Someone had removed them, emptied them, and put them back. Justify it."

"Don't look at me, I didn't do it. Why should I justify it?"

"You can't. To suppose it was done with murderous design would be egregious. It's inexplicable; and anything inexplicable on a deathbed is sinister, especially the deathbed of a millionaire. Before I can even consider the question of who did it I must answer the question, why?"

"Not necessarily," I argued. "I'll switch. Settle for the grand, but don't vote no. Vote yes and let Paul turn it over to the cops. That will fill the order."

"Pfui. Do you mean that?"

I gave up. "No. You're s[illegible]. The cops would only decide the nurse had left the bags empty and wouldn't admit it, and Johnny Arrow would start in slugging the whole damn Homicide Squad from Inspector Cramer right down the line." Struck with a sudden suspicion I eyed him. "Is this just a buildup? Do you already kno[illegible] why the bags were emptied, or think you do, and you want me to realize how brilliant you are?"

"No. I am lost. I can't even grope. It's more than mysterious, it's preposterous." He looked up at the clock. "It's bedtime, and now I must take this monstrosity to bed with me. First, though, some instructions for you for the morning. Your notebook, please?"

I got it from the drawer.

(continued on page 142)

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author's first appearance in EQMM

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SUZANNE BLANC

We welcome Suzanne Blanc's first appearance in EQMM—with a deceptively quiet story, told in a deceptively quiet style, about what has been so aptly called "malice domestic." (Was it Philip MacDonald who originated that telling phrase?—no, it was probably that great true-crime writer, William Roughead.)

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Suzanne Blanc is an American who has traveled extensively in Europe and the United States, in Mexico, India, and Japan. Her first novel, THE GREEN STONE, *won the Mystery Writers of America Edgar for the best first mystery novel of 1961 and the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière in France . . .*

THE HUMP IN THE BASEMENT

by SUZANNE BLANC

IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE pounding in his head began, Alec Fenton used to like to sit with Colette in front of the living-room fire and think of Marion. Particularly on wintry days, just when the pale pink traces of the sunset were being swallowed up by night, he would think of her. He would remember how, at the very same hour, he had called her to the basement to see where the plaster was peeling, how she had grumbled on the way down

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as she always did when he asked her to do anything.

He would remember how her pale, near-sighted eyes had peered into the dimness, how the naked overhead bulb had accentuated the brassiness of her hair and gilded the nervous thinness of her face. Then he would hear the acid of her voice asking, "What do you want now?" and recall with pleasure the scream that followed when he pushed her and her barbed tongue and her interminable complaints into the old disused well.

That part was very pleasant to remember, like an accomplishment long strived for and finally achieved. What happened in the silence afterward was less pleasant to remember. But having gone this far, Alec would make himself think of it all—the emptiness of the house around him, the unidentified creaks and rustlings in the walls, the metal of the furnace that glimmered in the shadows like watching eyes, the unforeseen panic that threatened to undermine his purpose.

In spite of all his careful planning he had thrown her clothes, the fur coat, the diamond watch, her best shoes, the blue suitcase, a pile of frothy lingerie into the well after her without stopping to make certain they were everything she would have taken. He had replaced the well cover, cemented it over, and stepped back to examine his work.

That was when panic seized him. The wet circle of cement humped noticeably in the dimness. Anyone coming down the basement stairs could detect it instantly. Sweating with fear he tried to move the fruit cupboard to cover the hump, but filled with fruit jars it was too heavy for him to budge.

He had been so paralyzed with fright that it took him several minutes to solve the problem. Then, in what seemed to be a frantic race against time, he emptied the cupboard, moved it, then replaced the jars.

As soon as that was finished his fright receded. Moving the cupboard proved, indeed, to be a stroke of genius: beneath it the wet cement was barely visible.

Still he was not fully assured. He kept feeling that he had forgotten something and he wandered through the house like a restless ghost searching for things he might have overlooked in his hasty accumulation of Marion's possessions. It was fortunate he did. He found her new gloves, her cloth purse, her black hat with the white feather lying on the hall table, her nylon dressing gown hanging on the bathroom door. Only after he had burned them all was he able to relax.

Now when he sat near Colette watching the fire he could recall just how slowly they had seemed

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burn—the hat especially, holding its shape long after the other objects had disintegrated—a round, thin black shell that slowly, very slowly collapsed. Sometimes he would almost imagine he could see it again shriveling in the flames, the final, distasteful trace of Marion vanishing from his life. And he would experience the same transition from uneasiness to contented relaxation.

At such moments his face must have betrayed him, for Colette would invariably interrupt. "A penny for your thoughts, Alec," he would say in her sweet young voice. "Share them with me. They must be happy ones."

He would turn from the flames to find her dark velvety eyes beaming at him above her embroidery.

"They are," he would answer. "I'm thinking of you, my dear."

Frequently, when he said that, he would put aside her embroidery and come to nestle at his feet, lay her dark silken head on his lap, and rub against his legs like an affectionate kitten. But often she would just smile happily at him, then go into the kitchen and fix them both some tea. She would return to her needlework and Alec would continue to stare at the fire trying to pick up the broken thread of his reminiscences.

For some reason he never seemed able to resume exactly where he had left off. His mind might shift ahead to the weeks after Marion's death or quixotically back to the period of careful preparation before he had killed her. He would, perhaps, dwell on the method he had used to seed the idea that Marion was interested in other men. He had chosen Mrs. Ryan, whose acre adjoined his, as the logical person to help him. Whenever Marion was at a club meeting or out shopping, he would call on the gossipy old lady.

"Do you know when my wife left?" he would inquire. And then, with shamefaced embarrassment ask, "Did she leave alone?"

He could not have lived next to Mrs. Ryan for all these years without being aware of the constant and twisted clattering of her tongue. He recognized the dawning suspicion in her rheumy eyes, reinforced it subtly, knew when it was fully formed and when every casual male visitor to his house automatically assumed the identity of one of Marion's lovers. He could tell from the pitying manner in which his neighbors greeted him that Mrs. Ryan was doing her work, and doing it well.

The scandal must have reached major proportions for the minister to visit him at the office and sympathetically inquire, but not too subtly, "How is everything at home, Alec?"

Mrs. Ryan had proved herself

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a master. The results of his worried innuendos far exceeded his original expectations, and after Marion's death Alec treated the old lady with cautious respect. Whenever he thought of how dangerous she could be, his eyes would leave the fire and dart in the direction of her house where, usually, the windows blazed long into the night.

And whenever he did that, Colette would be reminded to pull the drapes. "That nosey old woman is probably spying on us again," she would say as if, with some sixth sense, she was tuned into the channel of his thoughts. "I don't see why you tolerate her so, Alec."

"I've known her all my life," Alec would say. "She's not a bad old soul."

Colette would shake her head fondly and lean over to kiss him. "You're the kindest man I've ever known, Alec. You always have a good word for everyone."

No doubt because she lived so close, Alec thought more often of Mrs. Ryan than he did of the policeman who had investigated Marion's disappearance. The officer was just a large blue figure whose opinion, already formed by inquiries among the neighbors, was that Marion had obviously run away with another man.

"You say she's taken her clothes," he had said as if that clinched it.

Alec who had been sitting on the sofa with his head buried in his hands looked up despondently. "You've seen her closet. Some of her things are still there."

"Nothing left but house dresses, Mr. Fenton. You've got to face it. Even her suitcase is gone."

"Then the police won't help me find her?"

The policeman was patient, understanding. "What good would it do, Mr. Fenton, if she doesn't want to come back?"

After the officer had left, Alec went down to the basement and examined the light spot edging out beyond the fruit cupboard—just to make certain Marion would never come back. Already the cement had darkened and was blurring into anonymity with the rest of the floor.

There was an endless variety to the incidents he could recall during those quiet hours in front of the fire, flickering images that came and went, each in its own way delightful and satisfying—the wonderful peace that followed his freedom from Marion, the subdued kindness of the men in his employ, the unaccustomed invitations to dinner, the frequent consoling visits of the minister. Alec even had pleasant memories of his trip to Reno where, after a suitable stay, he was granted a divorce by default. No one appeared to contest the action. No one would ever appear to set the

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decree aside, for the only complainant was Marion and she was very, very dead.

Alec's single regret was that his memories must remain forever unshared. He could select a fragment of the experience at random, re-explore each nuance with the pride of accomplishment, yet be unable to display his ingenuity to anyone—not even to Colette.

On the occasions that she would curl on the floor at his feet and lay her glossy head on his lap he was often tempted to tell her about his cleverness. But, of course, he never did. He would stroke her hair and think instead about their first meeting, less than a year after he had returned from Reno.

He had grown tired of eating alone and decided to take his evening meals out. Lucky chance led him to select the restaurant in which Colette worked. She was so much younger than he, such a pretty little woman, that it did not occur to him in the beginning that her welcoming smile represented more than courtesy. He always sat at her table, however, and if she was not busy they chatted together.

He realized that her interest in him was more than casual when an unexpected business appointment delayed him and he arrived at the restaurant later than usual.

Colette's face brightened when she saw him. "I was afraid you weren't coming," she said. "I saved you a piece of chocolate pie."

"That was kind of you. Would you really have missed me if I hadn't come?"

With a charming blush she nodded.

He waited until she had finished work and drove her to the apartment she shared with a married sister. They sat outside talking for several hours and he told her about Marion—how one wintry afternoon he had returned home to find his wife gone.

"Without a word she simply packed her best clothes and left. Apparently there was another man," he commented sadly. "I never suspected it."

Colette's large soft eyes shimmered. "How terrible it must have been for you."

"It was hard," he said. "I kept thinking she'd come back, but she never did. After a while I accepted it. You can get used to anything. I divorced her finally."

Less than a month later he and Colette were married. He was very happy. Colette was such a quiet, gentle person that in retrospect Marion seemed brassier, more shrewish than ever. Colette fussed over him, catered to him, rarely expressed an opinion of her own. She was almost like a child in her eagerness to please; yet, before they had been married very long, he discovered that she could

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be unpredictably willful.

She developed a sudden illogical aversion to the house. "It's so old, Alec," she said unexpectedly one evening. "Why don't we sell it and buy a newer place?"

He could feel the color bleed from his face. He had an immediate vision of strangers prowling through the cellar, moving the fruit cupboard, and seeing the uneven ring of cement in the floor.

Instantly he recovered his composure. Colette had only made a suggestion. He parried it deftly. "This is my home, Colette. I was born here. I wouldn't be happy anywhere else."

As far as he was concerned that settled the matter. But it was not settled for Colette. Periodically she would complain about how old the house was. Intermittently she would suggest moving. She took to wandering through the building developments mushrooming up all around them. He could always tell when she had been househunting, for she would sit through dinner with a dreamy expression and sooner or later she would describe the places she had seen.

"They're all glass, Alec, great big windows. Everything is so shiny and new. Please, Alec, let's sell this old barn."

Even if he had wanted to please her he wouldn't have dared. He was tied to the house by more than the hump in the basement. The memories that were so enjoyable here would not be quite the same elsewhere.

He was patient with Colette. "The value of this place, my dear, is mostly in the land. The house, as you say, is old. But it is comfortable. We wouldn't get enough out of it and it's foolish to go into debt for a new one."

It was not until she actually called in a realtor to have the house appraised that he took Colette's whim seriously. When he learned that a stranger had been prowling through the cellar he was furious. He raised his fist and shouted at her. "No more realtors! I'm not selling. I want to hear no more about it. I had one nagging wife and that's enough. If you want a new house you'll wait till I'm dead."

Colette had wept unconsolably and he had finally apologized for his outburst. Still a coolness came between them until he became certain that she had really given up her dream. Then their relationship reverted to what it had been before the quarrel, and the tenor of their earlier days became the same.

Perhaps not quite the same. Alec dwelt ever increasingly in the past. He worked shorter hours at the office so that he could spend more time in front of the fire sorting through his memories. His images of Marion were frequently so vivid that momentarily

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he would sense her presence in the room. He would brace himself against the acid of her voice and glance apprehensively at her favorite chair, almost expecting to see the brassy waves of her hair glistening in the firelight. Instead he would find Colette bent over her embroidery.

Then with relief he would remember that Marion was safely dead, buried in the basement well, and she was going to stay there.

Then, one afternoon, he returned from the office to have Colette greet him at the door with cheeks flushed from excitement. Her dark eyes danced with delight. She threw her arms impulsively around his neck. "Alec! Alec! The most wonderful thing has happened. I'm going to have my new house after all. And we'll be able to afford it."

So she hadn't forgotten about selling the place, hadn't become reconciled to living here. He wondered what she had committed them to. He stiffened angrily and pushed her arms away. At that instant he hated her as much as he had hated Marion.

"I told you, Colette, we're not selling. No matter what you promised anyone, I won't agree to sell. Nothing you can say will change my mind."

Rebuffed, her enthusiasm faded. "But, Alec, I have nothing to do with it," she protested. "It's not my idea at all. A man was here today, an assessor from the State. He says the new highway is going right across this property. They'll pay you top dollar. But whether we like it or not the house will have to be pulled down."

Her voice—like the echo of Marion's scream resounding in the well—left a vacuum of silence behind it, a silence in which he heard the crash of ancient timbers being felled by bulldozers. He saw the cellar stretch before him, exposed and naked, with the telltale bulge of cement in the corner. He pictured giant hammers smashing into the floor.

And then the terrible pounding in his head began . . .

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2 NEW stories by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Edward D. Hoch has three series of stories running in EQMM. In one series the hero is Rand, the Double-C man and counterspy; in another the protagonist is Nick Velvet, the unique thief; in the third Captain Leopold solves unusual murder cases. Three major divisions of the mystery field—detection, crime, espionage. Mr. Hoch also writes off-the-trail stories—clever, provocative, baffling tales (remember his 'tec trio in our January 1969 issue illustrating the W-H-W of the genre?—the whodunit, howdunit, and whydunit). Well, here are two more off-the-trailers, completely different from the Rand-Velvet-Leopold sequences . . . a pair of Hochs—pronounced "hoax," but no pun intended —quite the contrary! . . .

1. The Seventh Assassin

by EDWARD D. HOCH

FAR ACROSS THE DESERT, NEAR the Oasis of Tranquillity, there lived the great Prince Alla-Khad, in a castle which rose out of the desert like a child's sand castle on a summer beach. Alla-Khad was more than a prince: he was the ruler of a kingdom without boundaries, a vaguely defined area that the mapmakers always shaded uncertainly and enclosed with dotted lines.

And Alla-Khad was wealthy beyond the wildest dreams of his forefathers, because of the oil he had never seen and which he sold to Americans he had never met. The money which flowed and flowed was enough to satisfy his every desire, however large, to tend his every need and the needs of his wives, who were many. With that much money Alla-Khad had no enemies—or, at most, but one.

His one enemy was a rival prince, Jamarra, whose kingdom also had dotted lines for bound-

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aries, but had no oil. Jamarra came, once a year, to pay homage to the great Prince Alla-Khad, but there was nothing humble in Jamarra's appearance. The annual visits always began badly and ended worse, and the subjects of Alla Khad would whisper among themselves of war.

This time, at the end of the worst of all visits, Alla-Khad himself gave the name to that which he knew he could win.

"War!" he shouted, thumping the table with a shiny scimitar. "War!"

"No war, my friend," Jamarra said, his voice low. "I need no war to defeat you. I will send against you seven assassins, and one year from this day all that my eyes can behold—all will be mine."

With that threat he departed the castle of Alla-Khad, and a deeper quiet settled over the vast desert . . .

The first assassin came three weeks later, in the dead of night, scaling the castle wall with a jeweled dagger between his teeth. The guards killed him before he even reached the ground on the other side.

Alla-Khad was pleased and ordered rewards for all, and the life of the castle continued as it always had been.

The second assassin came one month later, disguised as a member of the palace guard. He leaped from the ranks of turbaned men while Prince Alla-Khad was on an inspection round, and only the devotion of one of his wives saved him from certain death. She threw herself in front of the Prince at the final moment, taking the bullet which was meant for his body. She died soon after, and Alla-Khad buried her with full honors in the oasis graveyard. The assasin's body was thrown to the buzzards.

After this Alla-Khad grew more careful. Convinced now that Jamarra's threat was a serious one, he ceased to make formal inspections of the guard and spent most of his time only with his wives and his trusted advisers. For some months all went well. . .

The third assassin came in the night, entering the huge dim bedroom where Alla-Khad slept. He awakened only at the last moment, terrified, as the razor-sharp knife nicked his ear and plunged into the pillow. Grappling with the assassin in the dark, he discovered it to be one of his most beloved wives. It was with a deep sense of loss that he ordered her execution the following morning.

He knew now that drastic measures were needed to safeguard his life against Jamarra's league of assassins. From that day forward he was never in the company of one

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person alone. At private councils, in the bath, even at night when one of his wives visited him, there was always a guard present.

He was alone only in his private bedchamber, and even here the protections were complete. The electrical generator was pressed into service to power the latest types of alarm systems, and at the very entrance to his room an electric-eye system was connected to a battery of pistols which would fire simultaneously, spraying the doorway with a deadly barrage, if anyone attempted to cross the threshold after dark. By night the Prince entered and left the bedchamber through a secret stairway that was known only to himself.

But more than that, the third assassination attempt had instilled in Alla-Khad not only a feeling of insecurity about the people around him but about his own omnipotence—which he'd always assumed was a direct gift from Allah. Now, for the first time, he went to bed each night in his guarded castle with a gnawing doubt as to whether he would awake the next morning.

He never saw the fourth assassin. The man came with a group of pilgrims, and he carried a belt of dynamite sticks worn about his waist. Luckily for Alla-Khad, the man somehow bungled—and blew himself and his camel to bits while he was still a hundred yards from his goal.

After that the Prince installed more electronic gear, especially designed to detect bombs. His aides protested that all this equipment taxed the electrical generator beyond the limits of its capacity. But Alla-Khad was adamant.

The fifth assassin came in a single-engined plane, sweeping low over the desert and dropping an incendiary bomb on the servants' quarters. While the guards hastened to extinguish the blaze, and Alla-Khad watched the activity from his balcony, the plane circled and came in again, this time with machine guns tracing a puffy line of bullets across the sand just below the Prince's quarters.

It was only the accuracy of Alla-Khad's trained riflemen that turned the plane the last instant, sending it wobbling off course to crash in the desert. Alla-Khad sighed and went back inside his quarters. The attacks were growing more desperate, approaching all-out war. And yet he knew Jamarra would be true to his word. He had promised seven assassins, and he would send seven assassins. No tanks or armies would cross the sands between their two kingdoms.

And so the Prince waited for the sixth assassin to come. He doubled the guard around the castle, and installed anti-aircraft

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guns to prevent another attempt from the sky. And the fear and the insecurity grew large within him.

It was two more months before the sixth assassin came. They detected him one night at dinner, when two of Alla-Khad's guests fell to the floor, clutching their throats. The assassin had implanted a fast-acting poison in the food, but luckily the Prince had not tasted the food before the discovery was made. A search of the kitchen disclosed a servant hired only a few weeks earlier. He was shot while trying to escape.

After that the Prince employed two food tasters to sample everything before he permitted his lips to touch it.

But the months of tension and steadily growing terror were taking their toll. Alla-Khad was losing weight, and except for his nocturnal wanderings alone down the secret stairway he was rarely out of sight of his guards. He scanned the skies constantly, watching for another attack. His weary ears were atuned to the ticking of time bombs, and even in bed with one of his wives there was no relaxing from the threat of an unseen dagger.

Finally, when nearly a year had passed since Jamarra's threat, the Prince could stand it no longer. The seventh assassin had not yet come, and an end must be made to the intolerable situation. He dispatched messengers inviting Jamarra to their regular annual meeting. Of course Jamarra would not come to the castle, but he suggested instead a meeting on neutral desert ground.

On the appointed day Alla-Khad remained hidden in his castle, and sent instead his fiercest guards to seize and kidnap the great Prince Jamarra. The sands were bloodied with the deed that day, but by nightfall Jamarra had been delivered to the castle of Alla-Khad and placed in the hands of the torturers.

It was nearly midnight when Alla-Khad visited his enemy in the dungeons and stood close to the table upon which Jamarra gasped for breath. Even in a world of oil and airplanes and electric eyes, the old ways changed but slowly.

"Tell me, friend Jamarra," the Prince breathed. "Who is the seventh assassin?"

"No," Jamarra moaned.

"Tell me!"

His enemy opened his eyes, perhaps for the last time, and whispered, "There is no seventh assassin."

Alla-Khad straightened, knowing that Jamarra spoke the truth. There was no one, there never had been. Only six, and the seventh assassin was in his own mind—his own dark uncertainties and fears.

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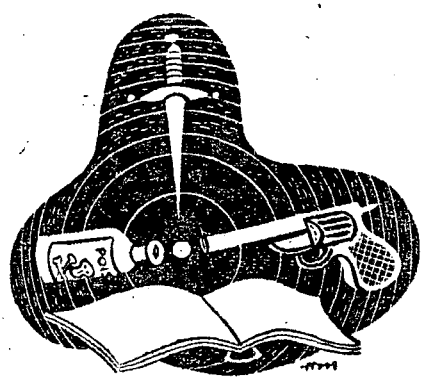
But now he had won. Jamarra had been forced to confess his strategy.

Alla-Khad left the torture chamber and went up the great curving staircase to his bedchamber. It was the first time in months that he had felt free to walk these stairs, to enter his chamber openly instead of sneaking in through the hidden way. Jamarra had been defeated, the seventh assassin would never come.

He remembered the electric eye only as he stepped across the threshold, and by then it was too late. The battery of pistols was already firing, the bullets already tearing at his body. And he knew in that dying moment that he himself was the seventh assassin.



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2: The Seventieth Number

by EDWARD D. HOCH

GORDAN KAHN DID NOT SET out to kill someone every day, and so this particular Wednesday was special in his life. He dressed carefully, making certain that the conservative striped tie was positioned just right, taking an extra few moments to polish his shoes.

He was meeting Dennis Marret for a drink in a private room at the College Club, supposedly to discuss the possibility of a settlement. But he already knew there was no chance of a fair settlement. Dennis Marret had robbed too many men like Gordon Kahn, taken their life's work away for a few thousand dollars. The time for talking had ended. Now Dennis Marret must die.

Gordon Kahn took a subway to 42nd Street and then walked the two blocks to the College Club. The woman at the front desk didn't even glance up as he entered. She was used to luncheon guests and business appointments held in the club's private dining rooms. He had only the waiter to contend with, and that wouldn't be difficult.

Dennis Marret rose from his padded armchair and greeted Kahn with a broad smile. "Well, well! Good to see you again! Glad we could meet here like this. Gets me away from the office for a few hours. I have a room reserved. Do you want lunch?"

Gordon cleared his throat. "No, just a drink, I think. I don't have much time."

He followed Marret into an elegantly furnished private room which could easily have held twelve people for dinner. The walls were decorated with elaborately spacious campus scenes, and the two men seemed lost along the sides of the big table, facing each other like opponents in some ritualized chess match.

Marret touched the service bell and almost immediately an elderly waiter appeared to take their order. Kahn managed to blow his nose and turn his head at that moment, so the waiter could not see his face. He mumbled an order for a Scotch and water through the folds of his handkerchief, and held it in place until the waiter had left.

"Well," Marret said again. Gordon Kahn remembered that word from the first time he'd ever met him, in the plush presidential offices of Marret Enterprises, Inc. "You asked for this meeting. Just

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what did you have in mind, Gordon?"

Kahn cleared his throat. It was a nervous habit that dated from his youth; and he'd never quite got over it. "About the transducer. I thought we might come to terms." He produced a little notebook and a ballpoint pen from his pocket, and carefully placed them on the table in front of him. The notebook was blank except for a single number he'd written on the first page months earlier.

"Terms, terms! Gordon, you don't seem to understand. That's all settled and done with. The transducer is now the property of Marret Enterprises. You were paid for it—a perfectly fair and aboveboard transaction."

"I received a payment of three thousand dollars with a promise of royalties for as long as I remained an employee of Marret Enterprises. I also received one thousand shares of stock in the corporation, again with the proviso that it reverted to the corporation when I left your employ. Six months later you fired me. I ended up with nothing for my invention but the original three thousand."

"Gordon," Marret said with an exasperated sigh, "these are the ways of the business world. I had to let you go because we're cutting back all along the line. You were our employee, so the transducer belongs to us. That's standard practice among corporations everywhere, and the courts have upheld it."

"The transducer was developed on my own time, before I joined Marret Enterprises."

"You would have a difficult time proving that in court. Besides, we took certain risks in its development. We invested a good deal of money."

The waiter returned with their drinks, and again Kahn covered his face with his handkerchief. "I seem to have a bit of a cold," he mumbled. As the waiter shut the door behind him, Kahn returned the handkerchief to his pocket. "You were saying?"

"I was saying you were damned lucky to have gotten what you did," Marret told him, his patience obviously wearing thin.

"Three thousand for an invention worth millions?"

Marret shrugged. "Or worth nothing. You had no money to develop and produce it. I did."

"How many others have you cheated like this?" Kahn asked.

"Others?"

"We should really start a club. People cheated by Dennis Marret out of their life's work."

Marret sipped his drink and then waved a hand in dismissal. "We have nothing more to talk about, Kahn. There's no point in my even being civil to you any longer."

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Gordon Kahn slipped the pen back into his pocket. When his hand reappeared it held a .22 caliber automatic.

"What in hell—put that gun down, you fool!"

"Do I get a fair payment for my invention, Mr. Marret?"

Marret's hand reached for the service bell. Kahn's hand went quickly across the table until the gun was only inches from Marret's head. When Marret kept reaching, Kahn shot him once through the left temple. Kahn coughed loudly to help cover the sound, and kept on coughing for a few seconds afterward.

Dennis Marret slumped in death across the table, a thin trickle of blood widening into a stain on the white cloth. Kahn held his breath to see if anyone would come running, but the sound of the little .22 had not passed through the massive oak door. He glanced around the room, seeking anything he might have touched, but his fingers had carefully avoided the glass of Scotch and water, and the gun was now safely back in his pocket.

For a moment he considered cutting the cord of the service bell, but then decided against it. Marret wouldn't be ringing for help any more. He started to pick up his open notebook next to the glass when there was a tapping on the door. He froze.

"Yes?" he managed to say, quite loudly. He stepped quickly to the door to prevent its opening.

"Telephone call for Mr. Marret," a voice announced.

"He can't be disturbed now. Take a message."

"Yes, sir."

Kahn cursed silently and opened the door a crack, watching the receding back of the old waiter. He couldn't stay there any longer. The hallway was clear and he stepped into it, closing the door behind him.

Marret had told his office where he was, and that was one thing Kahn hadn't figured on. He'd purposely phoned Marret's New York apartment last evening to arrange the meeting, rather than contacting him at the office where an efficient secretary might have recorded Kahn's name in an appointment book. He knew Marret's wife was in Florida, and there was no one else he would be likely to tell of the meeting.

But of course Marret had called his office and told them where he'd be. Had he mentioned Kahn's name? That was something Kahn had to find out—at once. He paused in the downstairs lobby of the club and sought out a pay telephone. Then he quickly dialed Marret's office and asked for his secretary.

"Ah . . . this is Mr. Rogers. I was supposed to meet Dennis Marret at the College Club, but he hasn't shown up yet. Do you

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know if he's on his way?"

The girl's voice was puzzled as she replied. "He's there now, Mr. Rogers. I just tried to phone him and they said he couldn't be disturbed. Perhaps he had another appointment first at the same club. He didn't tell me who he was meeting."

"Well, I'll wait a bit longer, then," Kahn said, relief flooding over him. He hung up and left the booth, feeling good. No name, no clue—not a single thing to link him with the killing. His revenge had been carried out as skillfully as one of his inventions.

And then he remembered his notebook on the table.

That damned waiter had interrupted him as he was about to pick it up. He'd left so quickly he'd forgotten it till now. There was no danger of fingerprints on the notebook's pebbled cover, and he hadn't touched the pages at all—but there was that damned number he'd scrawled on the first page months before. That number could send him to prison for the rest of his life.

He headed back upstairs toward the private dining room. There was no choice but to retrieve the notebook before someone else found it.

But as he turned down the hallway he saw the elderly waiter just opening the door. The waiter was holding a slip of paper in his hand—the phone message from Marret's secretary. No one had answered his knock and now he was going in.

Kahn hit him from behind, slamming his head against the oak door, but he was an instant too late. A scream sprang from the waiter's lips as he saw Marret's body.

Kahn tried to push him aside, but the man's frail body remained jammed in the doorway. His forehead was bleeding but he still kept screaming. Finally, hearing the sound of running footsteps, Kahn scrambled across the hallway and out through a fire door.

The fire stairs led directly to the street, and he hurried until he was outside mingling with the afternoon crowd. He'd gotten away, but just barely.

He knew the waiter hadn't seen his face, and no one in the lobby had noticed him. The secretary back at Marret Enterprises didn't know his real name, and he'd left no fingerprints. He'd gotten away with it—except for that notebook with its damned number written on the first page.

He could only hope now that the police would fail to discover its significance.

The case came to Lieutenant Burns of Homicide East, and it was the sort of case he could easily have done without. The murder of some bum or pusher was one thing, but the murder

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of Dennis Marret in a private dining room at the swank College Club was something else again. The story hit the front page of *The Times,* and for the first time in his life Burns had a personal call from City Hall inquiring as to his progress.

That progress, 24 hours after the murder, was just about nil. Only the waiter's prints were found on the Scotch glass, and there were no prints at all on the notebook. The waiter's meager description could fit half the men in New York, and Marret's secretary dissolved into tears when she told of only one phone call—from a mysterious Mr. Rogers who had never called before.

"Nothing," Burns said, speaking mostly to himself, but including the other detectives in the squadroom. "Frost, have you found any enemies who had a motive?"

"Hundreds, Lieutenant." Sergeant Frost flipped open his notebook. "Marret might have been a hero on the financial pages, but in business dealings he was a villain. His favorite trick seems to have been finding scientists with promising inventions and persuading them to join the firm. Marret got them to assign their patents to his company in exchange for a cash payment, some stock, and a lot of promises. After a few months he'd fire them and get back the stock. The inventors were left out in the cold, with maybe a few grand if they were lucky."

"A good enough motive for murder," Burns agreed. "Let's take a closer look at these guys."

"That's the trouble, Lieutenant. There are too many of them! Marret pulled the same stunt on thirty, forty people over the years. There are a dozen lawsuits pending against him right now. Marret Enterprises was big business, and bad business."

Burns began tapping his pencil against the edge of the desk. "What else?"

"The usual business enemies, and a couple of disgruntled husbands who claim he was fooling around with their wives."

"How'd he have time?" Burns asked. Then, to another of the detectives, "You've checked all the employees of the College Club, Riggs?"

"Every one. Nobody saw a thing except the old waiter."

Burns stared down at the murderer's notebook on the desk before him. "That brings us back to the number. 5560894. What in hell does it mean?"

"Does it have to mean anything, Lieutenant?"

Burns went on tapping his pencil. "According to the waiter's testimony, the killer returned and hit him from behind, trying to get back in the room. Why? It could only have been to retrieve

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this notebook, since he'd left nothing else in the room. The notebook itself is unexceptional—you can buy them for a dollar in any stationery store. So that leaves us with the number. The number was important enough to bring the killer back after it."

"But what does it mean?"

Burns walked to a blackboard they kept at one end of the squadroom for diagraming the scene of a crime. He brushed away some chalk dust and wrote the number, very large, in the center of the board.

5560894.

"Seven digits. It's some sort of identification number with seven digits. Let's list the obvious possibilities."

He continued writing, and after a moment stepped back to look at the board:

1. Social Security number
2. Telephone number
3. Army serial number
4. Credit card number
5. Membership number

"Let's start with these," he suggested. "Any comments?"

Frost shifted his weight in the chair, reaching for his wallet. "Social security numbers have nine digits," he said after a moment of checking. "So that's out."

"And Army serial numbers have eight," Riggs said.

Burns nodded and crossed out those two. "But it could be a phone number. 556-0894. Most cities use only numbers now, and even New York is gradually doing away with the old exchange letters."

Frost still had his wallet out, checking credit cards. "Most cards use eight or nine digits, but I suppose a smaller store could use seven. We can check some of the more likely ones."

"And check all the clubs in town for membership numbers, starting with the College Club itself."

For the next few hours four detectives were on the phone, checking out various possibilities. Burns himself took a break only long enough to phone his wife and tell her he'd be late. Then he was back at it.

By dinnertime they had nothing to show for their efforts. The College Club numbers never exceeded five digits, and a random sampling of a dozen department stores had turned up only one Fifth Avenue men's shop that used a seven-digit charge number. They informed Burns that 5560894 was unassigned at present.

Burns sipped some water from a paper cup and called across the squadroom to Frost. "How about the phone numbers?"

"Nothing yet, Lieutenant. None of the old exchanges started off with a double number like 55. Some of the newer ones

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do—we've got 777 and 889 now, but no 556."

"Put somebody on checking out-of-town phone companies. Especially the suburbs and large cities across the country. Our killer wanted that number back because he thought we could trace him through it. Let's show him he was right."

They came back to it in the morning, knowing that the phone number theory hadn't worked out. In the 20 largest cities they'd found only one 556-0894, and it was the number of a West Coast car wash.

"All right," Burns decided. "It's back to the blackboard." He erased what he'd written the previous day and started on a new list:

1. Auto license number
2. Auto registration number
3. Laundry or dry cleaning mark
4. Prison serial number
5. Gun registration number

"Auto license numbers usually have a letter in them," Frost pointed out.

"All right." Burns rewrote the number on the blackboard. 556-0-894. "Suppose the 0 is a letter rather than a digit. That would do it. Somebody check the Motor Vehicle Bureau, and send out teletype messages to other states."

They worked all day, and into the night, and by midnight Burns was ready to give it up. There was no such license number as 556-0-894 issued in New York or in any of the surrounding states. The New York State Motor Vehicle Bureau used seven-digit numbers for auto registration, driver's license, and other forms, but the number in question failed to check out. Seven-digit numbers also appeared on auto inspection stickers in the state, but here again they drew a blank. The number in question hadn't yet been used that year.

Riggs reported on the laundry marks. "It's like the private clubs yesterday, Lieutenant. Membership numbers and laundry marks just aren't that long."

By midnight they had received teletyped replies from every major prison in the country. Only the largest used seven-digit numbers for their prisoners, and 5560894 meant nothing to them. Likewise, the gun registration number failed to check out. Burns went home.

In the morning over breakfast he sleepily wrote the number in the margin of the newspaper. 5560894. He showed it to his wife.

"Betty, what would this number mean to you?"

She eyed it indifferently as she poured his coffee. "Zip code? My sister in Minnesota is 55614."

"What about the other two digits?"

She frowned at the number. "Couldn't you just cross those out?"

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He went back to the squadroom and stared at the blackboard. The feeling had grown in him that the number was the key to the entire case—if they could only decipher it.

"All right," he said to Frost and Riggs and the others. "I want to hear the wildest ideas you can come up with. Anything that this number could possibly be. Start talking."

After fifteen numbing minutes he stepped back to look at the board. The list was truly amazing:

1. A code of some sort
2. Lottery number
3. Horse race winners
4. Football signals
5. Latitude and longitude
6. A date or time
7. Serial number on currency
8. Baseball lineup
9. Magazine circulation
10. Radio station call numbers

"We could go on like this all night," he decided. "Things like codes are out because our killer wouldn't have been so anxious to get the number back if it was in code. It's too long for the usual lottery number, but we can check the New York State lottery."

"They keep no record of who buys what number," Frost pointed out.

"Horse-race winners wouldn't include a zero," someone else said. "And how would football signals point to a killer?"

"Ham radio stations use letters along with their numbers."

"Baseball lineups, magazine circulation—all nothing, a big nothing," Burns said, crossing them out. "Currency serial number—what would that tell us? This has to be something the killer had a reason for writing down. Latitude and longitude would be . . . let's see . . . 55 degrees, 60 minutes latitude, and 89 degrees, 4 minutes longitude." He consulted the atlas in his desk. "Without north and south or east and west indicated, it could be in four spots on the earth—all of them near the north or south poles."

"A date or time doesn't make sense, either," Frost grumbled.

Burbank, a cop on robbery detail, came in and rummaged around on his desk at the other end of the room. "Can I borrow your stapler, Lieutenant?" he asked finally, coming forward to get it.

"Sure." Burns leaned over and passed it to him.

"Any break in your murder case yet?"

"None." He pointed to the number. "What does it mean to you, Burbank?"

"This is the Marret thing?" He went on stapling his papers. "How about an employee payroll number or something like that? Marret Enterprises is a big outfit."

"Nothing in seven digits,"

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Burns mumbled. "We checked it the first day."

"How about the numbers of golf clubs?"

Burns sighed with growing irritation. "It has to be something that connects the killer with Marret. The number in the notebook meant something, or the killer wouldn't have tried to get it back."

Burbank finished attaching the papers and returned the stapler to Burns. "Thanks. Say, maybe it's a safe combination, or—no, I guess not."

"Not a s a f e combination," Burns said. "And no dog license number." He glanced at a pad scribbled with notes. "Actually, we've checked out sixty-nine types of numbers—sixty-nine d e a d ends. We've just about hit rock bottom—" He stopped talking and stared at the bottom of the stapler in his hand. He could feel his heart beating faster as he reached across the desk for the telephone. "Get me Washington," he told the operator. "I don't know the number, but I want to speak to—"

Gordon Kahn was humming a little tune as he opened his apartment door and stepped into the hallway. He stopped humming when he saw the three men waiting there.

"Gordon Kahn?" the oldest of them asked. He was a ruddy-faced man with graying hair who looked as if he hadn't slept in days.

"That's me. Can I help you?"

The man flipped open his wallet and showed a badge. "I'm Lieutenant Burns, Homicide East. We'd like to question you about the murder of Dennis Marret."

Kahn glanced around, looking for a way out. One of the younger men placed a hand on h i s shoulder. "Well," Kahn said with a sigh, "it took you three days to find me."

"You need not make a statement until a lawyer—"

"I know, I know," Kahn said with a wave of his hand. "How'd you get me? It was the number in the notebook, wasn't it?"

The man named Burns nodded. "That, and a seven-digit number I finally noticed on the bottom of a stapler on my desk. I phoned the Patent Office in Washington, and they told me 5560894 was the patent number on the invention you assigned to Marret Enterprises."

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a *non*-detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Nearly all of Agatha Christie's many short stories relate the adventures and exploits of her detective characters—Hercule Poirot, of course, and Miss Jane Marple and Harley Quin and Parker Pyne and the husband-and-wife team, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford; and we have brought all of them to you since EQMM was first published 29 years ago. But Agatha Christie has also written a different kind of short story—no detection, sometimes no crime—what might be termed a story of pure mystery and suspense. Here is one of those darkling stories . . .

IN A GLASS DARKLY

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

I'VE NO EXPLANATION OF THIS story. I've no theories about the why and wherefore of it. It's just a thing—that happened.

All the same, I sometimes wonder how things would have gone if I'd noticed at the time just that one essential detail that I never appreciated until so many years afterward. If I *had* noticed it—well, I suppose the course of three lives would have been entirely altered. Somehow—that's a very frightening thought.

For the beginning of it all, I've got to go back to the summer of 1914—just before the war—when I went down to Badgeworthy with Neil Carslake. Neil was, I suppose, about my best friend. I'd known his brother Alan too, but not so well. Sylvia, their sister, I'd never met. She was two years younger than Alan and three years younger than Neil.

Twice, while we were at school together, I'd been going to spend part of the holidays with Neil at Badgeworthy and twice something had intervened. So it came about that I was twenty-three when I first saw Neil and Alan's home.

We were to be quite a big party there. Neil's sister Sylvia had just

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got engaged to a fellow called Charles Crawley. He was, so Neil said, a good deal older than she was, but a thoroughly decent chap and quite reasonably well-off.

We arrived, I remember, about seven o'clock in the evening. Everyone had gone to his room to dress for dinner. Neil took me to mine. Badgeworthy was an attractive, rambling old house. It had been added to freely in the last three centuries and was full of little steps up and down, and unexpected staircases. It was the sort of house in which it's not too easy to find your way about.

I remember Neil promised to come and fetch me on his way down to dinner. I was feeling a little shy at the prospect of meeting his people for the first time. I remember saying with a laugh that it was the kind of house where one expected to meet ghosts in the passages, and he said carelessly that he believed the place was said to be haunted but that none of them had ever seen anything, and he didn't even know what form the ghost was supposed to take.

Then he hurried away and I set to work to dive into my suitcases for my evening clothes. The Carslakes weren't well-off; they clung to their old home, but there were no menservants to unpack for you or valet for you.

Well, I'd just got to the stage of tying my tie. I was standing in front of the glass. I could see my own face and shoulders and behind them the wall of the room—a plain stretch of wall broken in the middle by a door—and just as I had finally settled my tie I noticed that the door was opening.

I don't know why I didn't turn round—I think that would have been the natural thing to do; anyway, I didn't. I just watched the door swing slowly open—and as it swung I saw into the room beyond.

It was a bedroom—a larger room than mine—with two bedsteads in it, and suddenly I caught my breath.

For at the foot of one of those beds was a girl and round her neck were a pair of man's hands and the man was slowly forcing her backward and squeezing her throat, so that the girl was being slowly suffocated.

There wasn't the least possibility of a mistake. What I saw was perfectly clear. What was being done was murder.

I could see the girl's face clearly, her vivid golden hair, the agonized terror of her beautiful face, slowly suffusing with blood. Of the man I could only see his back, his hands, and a scar that ran down the left side of his face toward his neck.

It's taken some time to tell, but in reality only a moment or two passed while I stared dum-

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founded. Then I wheeled round to the rescue . . .

And on the wall behind me, the wall reflected in the glass, there was only a large Victorian mahogany wardrobe. No open door—no scene of violence. I swung back to the mirror. The mirror reflected only the wardrobe. . .

I passed my hands over my eyes. Then I sprang across the room and tried to pull forward the wardrobe and at that moment Neil entered by the other door from the passage and asked me what the hell I was trying to do.

He must have thought me slightly balmy as I turned on him and demanded whether there was a door behind the wardrobe. He said, yes, there was a door, it led into the next room. I asked him who was occupying the room and he said people called Oldham—a Major Oldham and his wife. I asked him then if Mrs. Oldham had very fair hair and when he replied dryly that she was dark I began to realize that I was probably making a fool of myself.

I pulled myself together, made some lame explanation, and we went downstairs. I told myself that I must have had some kind of hallucination—and felt generally rather ashamed and a bit of an ass.

And then—and then—Neil said, "My sister Sylvia," and I was looking into the lovely face of the girl I had just seen being suffocated to death . . . and I was introduced to her fiancé, a tall dark man *with a scar down the left side of his face.*

Well—that's that. I'd like you to think and say what you'd have done in my place. Here was the girl—the identical girl—and here was the man I'd seen throttling her—and they were to be married in about a month's time. . .

Had I—or had I not—had a prophetic vision of the future? Would Sylvia and her husband come down here to stay sometime in the future, and be given that room (the best spare room), and would that scene I'd witnessed take place in grim reality?

What was I to do about it? *Could* I do anything? Would anyone—Neil—the girl herself—would they believe me?

I turned the whole business over and over in my mind the week I was down there. To speak or not to speak? And almost at once another complication set in. You see, I fell in love with Sylvia Carslake the first moment I saw her . . . I wanted her more than anything on earth . . . And in a way that tied my hands.

And yet, if I didn't say anything, Sylvia would marry Charles Crawley and Crawley would kill her . . .

And so, the day before I left, I blurted it all out to her. I said

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I expected she'd think me touched in the intellect or something, but I swore solemnly that I'd seen the thing just as I told it to her and that I felt if she was determined to marry Crawley I ought to tell her my strange experience.

She listened very quietly. There was something in her eyes I didn't understand. She wasn't angry at all. When I'd finished, she just thanked me gravely. I kept repeating like an idiot, "I *did* see it. I really did see it," and she said, "I'm sure you did if you say so. I believe you."

Well, the upshot was that I went off not knowing whether I'd done right or been a fool, and a week later Sylvia broke off her engagement to Charles Crawley.

After that the war happened, and there wasn't much leisure for thinking of anything else. Once or twice when I was on leave, I came across Sylvia, but as far as possible I avoided her.

I loved her and wanted her just as badly as ever, but I felt, somehow, that it wouldn't be playing the game. It was owing to me that she'd broken off her engagement to Crawley, and I kept saying to myself that I could only justify the action I had taken by making my attitude a purely disinterested one.

Then, in 1916, Neil was killed and it fell to me to tell Sylvia about his last moments. We couldn't remain on a formal footing after that. Sylvia had adored Neil and he had been my best friend. She was sweet—adorably sweet in her grief. I just managed to hold my tongue and went out again praying that a bullet might end the whole miserable business for me. Life without Sylvia wasn't worth living.

But there was no bullet with my name on it. One grazed me below the right ear and one was deflected by a cigarette case in my pocket, but otherwise I came through unscathed. Charles Crawley was killed in action at the beginning of 1918.

Somehow—that made a difference. I came home in the autumn of 1918 just before the Armistice and I went straight to Sylvia and told her that I loved her. I hadn't much hope that she'd care for me straight away, and you could have knocked me down with a feather when she asked me why I hadn't told her sooner.

I stammered out something about Crawley and she said, "But why did you think I broke off with him?" And then she told me that she'd fallen in love with me just as I'd done with her—from the very first minute.

I said I thought she'd broken off her engagement because of the story I told her and she laughed scornfully and said that if you loved a man you wouldn't be as cowardly as that, and we went over that old vision of mine again

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and agreed that it was queer, but nothing more.

Well, there's nothing much to tell for some time after that. Sylvia and I were married and we were happy. But I realized, as soon as she was really mine, that I wasn't cut out for the best kind of husband. I loved Sylvia devotedly, but I was jealous, absurdly jealous of anyone she so much as smiled at. It amused her at first. I think she even rather liked it. It proved, at least, how devoted I was.

As for me, I realized quite fully and unmistakably that I was not only making a fool of myself, but that I was endangering all the peace and happiness of our life together. I knew, I say, but I couldn't change. Every time Sylvia got a letter she didn't show to me I wondered who it was from. If she laughed and talked with any man, I found myself getting sulky and watchful.

At first, as I say, Sylvia laughed at me. She thought it a huge joke. Then she didn't think the joke so funny. Finally she didn't think it a joke at all—

And slowly she began to draw away from me. Not in any physical sense, but she withdrew her secret mind from me. I no longer knew what her thoughts were. She was kind—but sadly, as though from a long distance.

Little by little I realized that she no longer loved me. Her love had died and it was I who had killed it . . .

The next step was inevitable. I found myself waiting for it—dreading it. . .

Then Derek Wainwright came into our lives. He had everything that I hadn't. He had brains and a witty tongue. He was good-looking, too, and—I'm forced to admit it—a thoroughly good chap. As soon as I saw him I said to myself, "This is just the man for Sylvia . . ."

She fought against it. I know she struggled . . . but I gave her no help. I couldn't. I was entrenched in my gloomy, sullen reserve. I was suffering like hell—and I couldn't stretch out a finger to save myself.

And I didn't help her. I made things worse. I let loose at her one day—a string of savage, unwarranted abuse. I was nearly mad with jealousy and misery. The things I said were cruel and untrue and I knew while I was saying them how cruel and how untrue they were. And yet they gave me a savage pleasure.

I remember how Sylvia flushed and shrank . . .

I drove her to the edge of endurance.

I remember she said, "This can't go on . . ."

When I came home that night the house was empty—empty. There was a note—quite in the traditional fashion.

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In it she said that she was leaving me—for good. She was going down to Badgeworthy for a day or two. After that she was going to the one person who loved her and needed her. I was to take that as final.

I suppose that up to then I hadn't really believed my own suspicions. This confirmation in black and white of my worst fears sent me raving mad. I went down to Badgeworthy after her as fast as the car would take me.

She had just changed her dress for dinner, I remember, when I burst into the room. I can see her face—startled—beautiful—afraid.

I said, "No one but me shall ever have you. No one."

And I caught her throat in my hands and gripped it and bent her backward.

And suddenly I saw our reflection in the mirror. Sylvia choking and myself strangling her, and the scar on my cheek where the bullet had grazed it under the right ear.

No—I didn't kill her. That sudden revelation paralyzed me and I loosened my grasp and let her slip onto the floor . . .

And then I broke down—and she comforted me . . . Yes, she comforted me.

I told her everything and she told me that by the phrase "the one person who loved and needed her" she had meant her brother Alan . . . We saw into each other's hearts that night, and I don't think, from that moment, that we ever drifted away from each other again . . .

It's a sobering thought to go through life with—that, but for the grace of God and a mirror, I might have been a murderer . . .

One thing did die that night—the devil of jealousy that had possessed me so long . . .

But I wonder sometimes—suppose I hadn't made that initial mistake—the scar on the *left* cheek—when really it was the *right*—reversed by the mirror . . . Should I have been so sure the man was Charles Crawley? Would I have warned Sylvia? Would she be married to me—or to him?

Or are the past and the future all one?

I'm a simple fellow—and I can't pretend to understand these things—but I saw what I saw—and because of what I saw, Sylvia and I are together—in the old-fashioned words—till death do us part. And perhaps beyond . . .

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This is the 339th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a first story unlike any other first story that has ever appeared in EQMM: almost "black humor," almost a story of the Absurd—but only "almost" . . . If a tale approaching "black humor" and the Absurd is not your cup of 'tec tea, we suggest that you skip the next eight pages . . .

"The World's Record Holder" was Gerald Egger's first serious effort at writing fiction. On finishing the story he "shoved it in a drawer and ignored it," and then "went through the frustrating and fruitless process" of continuing to write and trying to sell his other stories. Finally, in desperation, he sent off his first story, and "ironically it turned out to be my first story accepted for publication." (Is there a lesson here for other aspiring new writers?)

The author, Gerald Egger, is a teacher in a suburb of Rochester, New York. He received an M.A. in Creative Writing from Ohio University in 1969. Before becoming a teacher and turning to writing he was a dishwasher, shoeshiner, bartender, mailman, short-order cook, and "gandy dancer" on a railroad. Surely the man has tales to tell! . . .

THE WORLD'S RECORD HOLDER

by GERALD EGGER

I KNEW THE MINUTE I MET Otis that he hated me—not just disliked me, mind you, but actually, deep in his gut, hated me. I call him Otis now because he isn't around to hear me, but if I had ever been so familiar with him while we were working together, he probably would have killed me. He was always so serious, Old Otis: he never smiled—well, maybe a sadistic grin now and then that might be mistaken for a smile—and he al-

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ways insisted that everyone call him Mr. Woodbox. He said that a little dignity was good for any man, regardless of his profession.

When Mr. Lewis, the boss, introduced me, Otis looked contemptuously at my outstretched hand, snorted, and turned his back to me, muttering something unintelligible. Needless to say, I was very upset at having my first day on the job start so unfavorably. I had been extra-careful that morning to make myself as inoffensive as possible—deodorant, mouthwash, clean fingernails, the works; but still, there was Otis sulking moodily in the corner.

Mr. Lewis was embarrassed. I could tell by the way he fidgeted and tugged at his collar. "Now listen, Mr. Woodbox," he said in a squeaky voice, "this young man will just have to do. You can't keep turning down all the applicants, you know. Besides, it's not easy finding energetic strong young men to do this type of work."

Otis turned around, his eyes narrowed like a snake's and his fists clenched as though he wanted to hit Mr. Lewis. Luckily they were both old men or there might have been a grand fight, Otis was so mad. "This type of work!" Otis yelled. "This type of work! Why do you say it like that—like I shouldn't be proud of my occupation? Why, you phony jerk, I made my work into an art form before you owned your first toy casket! You morticians think you're the only ones who figure in the scheme of things after the customer's gone, huh? Well, what about me? I'd like to see you get down in a hole with your fancy black suit and top hat and dig a good grave. Why, you—"

He would have said more but his upper plate slipped out and fell to the floor, he was talking so furiously, and as he stooped to pick it up, Mr. Lewis eased out the door.

"Nevertheless," Mr. Lewis hollered over his shoulder, "this is positively the last applicant, so you better get used to working with him."

Otis grabbed a flowerpot from the floor and threw it at the retreating figure, but his muscles were so weakened with age that the pot flew only about ten feet and shattered against a gravestone. Cursing and mumbling, he put his teeth back in and started stamping about the room, kicking everything that got in his way, and completely ignoring me.

Actually, what we were in was a one-room shack in the middle of the cemetery—a hut that Otis called his office. In it he had all his equipment—shovels, picks, flowerpots, small flags for the graves on Memorial Day, and a small untidy desk. It was a tiny dingy room, gray with dust. It

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seemed to match Otis' personality perfectly.

After a while he sat down at his desk and began to read the latest copy of the *Funeral Director's Quarterly*. I still stood there, nervously waiting for him to say something. Then he angrily tore the magazine to pieces and scattered them all over the floor.

"Damn fools," he said bitterly. "Ignore me, will they? 'How to Comfort the Bereaved When They Become Hysterical.' What the hell kind of an article is that? Why don't they print something useful sometime, like about different digging techniques for different types of soil, or something?"

He looked at me and shook his head despairingly. I smiled stupidly, not knowing how to answer.

"Well, don't just stand there, you idiot!" he bellowed. "Grab a broom and get this place cleaned up."

While I was picking up the pieces of the magazine, he made himself a cup of coffee and sat at his desk, watching me. When I finished, I stood back proudly so he could see what a good job I had done. He just frowned and spat out the window.

"Know anything about digging graves?" he asked, knowing I didn't.

"No, sir, Mr. Woodbox," I said eagerly, "but I'm certainly willing to learn. And I know I couldn't have a better teacher." I figured a little flattery couldn't hurt.

It didn't help either. "I aint no teacher," he said, "I'm a gravedigger. And a damn good one at that. I've been digging graves for forty-five years, and let me tell you it's a thankless job."

"I'm sure it is, sir," I said, trying to sound sympathetic.

"You know who they called in to consult with when President Roosevelt died?"

"You, sir?"

"Damn right. And the State Department wanted me to go to Russia to see about Stalin when he passed on. But I wouldn't have anything to do with it. I told them that was carrying a good thing a little too far. I mean, I'm patriotic and I want to help my government and all, but that was a little too much to ask. Know what I mean?"

I nodded agreeably. At this point I would have agreed with anything he said.

"Yes, sir," he continued. "Forty-five years I've been digging graves, ever since I was twenty. And I've made an art, a science, out of it. I'm pretty respected in my field—by those who appreciate a well-dug grave, that is. When I started, a man needed dedication. You guys today don't have no dedication."

"Oh, I do, Mr. Woodbox, I really do," I lied. Actually the

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only reason I took this job was because I was desperate and couldn't find anything else. Why else would anyone want to become a gravedigger's assistant, for God's sake?

"You know anything about the history of gravedigging?" he asked. "No, of course you don't. Well, some day when they're talking about the great gravediggers of the past, the name of Otis Woodbox will be mentioned right alongside of Johann Heinrich Karl Thieme."

"Who, sir?"

"Johann Heinrich Karl Thieme. You never even heard of him? He was a German—from Aldenburg, Germany. He was the greatest gravedigger of all time—holds the world record. In fifty years he dug 23,311 graves." He looked at me to see if I was impressed. I was. I really was. "You know how many graves I've dug, kid?"

I shook my head, and he laughed. "In forty-five years I've dug 23,305 graves. I'm only six graves short and I've got five years to go. Know what that means?"

"That some day you'll be the world record holder?"

"Damn right," he said. "Why, I can dig hundreds of graves in five years. Then my name will be in the record books, not Johann Heinrich Karl Thieme's. It'll be my mark others will have to break, not his." The hairs in his nose bristled with excitement and he cracked his knuckles to show that his joints weren't completely stiffened with age.

"I know you don't think that's much," he said. "You kids aren't interested in things like gravedigging. All you think about is girls. You let the important things go."

"Oh, no, you're wrong there, Mr. Woodbox," I protested. "Really you are. I never think about girls. I can take them or leave them alone."

"You're a liar," he said. "I suppose, though, I've got to make the best of it. I don't want you to think about anything the next few weeks except gravedigging, understand? If I'm going to get anything across to you, even the basic fundamentals, I'll have to have your undivided attention."

And so I gave him my undivided attention. I learned about soil types, tools, the best air and ground temperature for burying, and the proper way to hold a shovel so as not to get blisters. He was able to concentrate on training me because people in our neighborhood weren't dying very fast and, therefore, didn't need too many graves dug.

Every afternoon, when we were through with our training session, Otis would sit down with the newspaper and eagerly read the obituaries. More often than not he would throw down the paper

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in a rage and then rant and rave about modern medicine and how it was keeping him from setting his new world record.

"Damn them doctors," he would shout, his face contorted with hatred. "Keep a man from doing his job, will they? I used to be able to bury two or three a week before those meddlers started fooling around with all those miracle drugs. Now I'm lucky to get two a month. Oh, for a good old flu epidemic." He would go pout in a corner while I picked up the shredded newspaper.

I tried to console him. "Hell, Mr. Woodbox, you've still got plenty of time. We've buried three since I've been here. You're getting closer and closer to the record."

"But I'm not getting any younger," he would moan, tears streaming down his wrinkled cheeks. "Look at these hands. Look what my arthritis is beginning to do to them. Pretty soon I won't even be able to hold a shovel any more. Oh, why won't somebody die and make an old man happy?" Sometimes I really felt sorry for him, even though he was such a despicable old man.

As the days passed, Otis became more vindictive. He criticized everything I did, and even swung at me with a pick one time because the sides of the hole I was digging weren't exactly even. He cursed and swore bitterly at me and everyone else, and even went so far as to write a letter to his congressman insisting that he support mercy killing and introduce a bill outlawing cremation.

"Why, what with all the hullabaloo about air pollution these days," Otis explained to me, "why should they allow these crematoriums to pump all that smoke into the sky? It's been proven that human smoke is worse for the lungs than cigarette smoke."

After one disheartening day of nothing but practise holes we returned to the shack and found Mr. Lewis waiting for us. "What the hell do you want?" Otis asked, brushing dirt from his clothes.

"I just wanted to know how your apprentice is coming along," Mr. Lewis said nervously.

"He's an idiot," said Otis. "Can't do anything right. He'll never make it in this trade. No dedication."

"The reason I wanted to know," said Mr. Lewis, "is because of the new rule that has gone into effect."

Otis squinted at him and asked, "What new rule?"

"The new retirement rule. We sent you a notice about it last week. Didn't you read it?" He knew that Otis ignored anything that came from the main office.

"What are you jabbering

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about?" Otis demanded.

"Now you know, Mr. Woodbox, that every man should have a few years of carefree rest before he is called by his Maker," Mr. Lewis went on. "So we—I mean the management—have decided that at the age of sixty-five all employees must retire. With a pension, of course."

Otis was so upset that his knees gave way and he fell heavily back into his chair. "You mean that I—?" he began.

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Lewis, smiling. "This means that you won't have to spend your declining years in the cemetery. Now, our records show that you will be sixty-five at the end of the week—on the eighteenth, to be exact—so you have until then to get your young helper here ready to take your place."

"But the record," Otis protested. "What about my record?"

"I'm sure you will thank us when you have thought about it. Just imagine yourself relaxing the rest of your life, with no cares, no shovels, no more graves to dig. Isn't that a pleasant thought? And you will still be eligible for free funeral and burial rites. Oh, Mr. Woodbox, I certainly do envy you."

"Get out!" Otis said menacingly. "Get the hell out of my office."

The smile faded from Mr. Lewis' face as he backed out of the shack. "I'm afraid that's the way it is, Mr. Woodbox," he said. "A rule is a rule, as they say. You have until the end of the week."

Otis sat quietly, except for an occasional moan, at his desk and buried his head in his arms. I felt more uneasy than I had that first day waiting for him to notice me. I didn't know if I should try to comfort him or not. I decided not to for fear that he would start crying. There's nothing worse than when an old man cries.

Slowly he lifted his head and turned toward me. The look on his face was so frightening that I shrank back into a corner. "You!" he said, pointing a crooked finger accusingly. "You knew about this all along, didn't you? You plotted with that damn Lewis to get rid of me so I couldn't set a new world record, didn't you?"

"Oh, no, sir," I pleaded, "No, no, you're wrong, Mr. Woodbox. I knew nothing about it. Honest I didn't. First I heard about it was right now, like you. I swear."

His appearance changed from hatred to despair, and he began to beat his head on the desk. "You really shouldn't do that, Mr. Woodbox," I said. "You could hurt yourself badly that way—even cause some brain damage, maybe."

He stopped and looked at me with a grin of pure evil. "You're

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right," he said. "I could hurt myself." He quickly jumped up from the chair and started leafing through the calendar he had on the wall. "Let's see. Less than a week. Doesn't give me much time." Suddenly he laughed. "Sure, I can make it. How many more graves do I need, kid?"

"Well," I said, "there were those two accident victims last week, so I guess you only need one more to tie the record, two to break it."

"Okay," he said, clapping his hands excitedly. "You go home now and come back tomorrow ready to work, you hear?"

As I left, I could hear him giggling to himself. Poor old guy, I thought, the shock was too much for him.

When I reported to work the next morning I found old Otis polishing his pick and shovel and humming a funeral march. He looked up at me and smiled almost affectionately.

"Have we got a job to do this morning?" I asked hopefully.

He nodded, still smiling and polishing.

"Boy, that's great, Mr. Woodbox," I said. "Maybe you'll break the record after all."

He stood up and turned to me. "No doubt about it," he said. "Guess who we're burying today."

I shook my head and smiled back at him.

"Your friend, Mr. Lewis," he said. "It seems he had a fatal accident last night. Ran into the sharp edge of a shovel while making his nightly tour of the cemetery. No one knows just how it happened."

"Oh, no!" I said. "How terrible."

"Not so terrible," Otis said, beginning to hum again. "Mr. Lewis is going to help me set a new record."

Suddenly I understood what he meant. "For God's sake," I cried. "You did it!"

"I'll do anything to break that record. Your friend, Mr. Lewis, knew that, and so do you."

"But you can't get away with it! Surely the police will suspect you. What will you do then?"

"It doesn't matter what happens to me. The police are slow. By the time they get around to arresting me I will have broken the record. Johann Heinrich Karl Thieme will be beaten."

"But you needed two more graves for the record. You won't have time for the last one."

"Oh, yes, I will," he said, picking up his shovel.

"Oh, hell!" I said as I realized his intention.

He charged at me, the shovel aimed at my head. Luckily, because he was old and I was young, I was able to step out of his way, and his swing missed me. As he flew past me I picked up a heavy flowerpot and—in self-

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defense, mind you—crashed it down on his head.

I have just finished putting the last shovelful of dirt on the grave. The mourner has left, and I am alone in the cemetery. A few yards to my right is where I buried Mr. Lewis, a huge monument marking the site. The small marker on the grave I just finished reads simply: *Otis Woodbox—1904-1969—R.I.P.*

I can't help but smile with pride. Otis would be surprised to see what a good job I've done. Well, that's that: my first two graves.

Imagine, only 23,310 to break the world's record.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Case, David	FENGRIFFEN: A CHILLING TIME	Hill & Wang	$ 5.00	March
Coe, Tucker	WAX APPLE	Random House	4.95	2/23
Piper, Evelyn	THE STAND-IN	McKay-Washburn	5.95	3/13
Platt, Kin	THE PUSHBUTTON BUTTERFLY	Random House	4.95	2/18
Siller, Van	IT HAD TO BE YOU	Doubleday & Co.	4.50	3/20

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Buell, John	THE PYX	Popular Library	.60	2/17
Lathen, Emma	BANKING ON DEATH	Pyramid	.60	2/15
Marric, J. J.	GIDEON'S BADGE	Popular Library	.60	2/3
Marric, J. J.	GIDEON'S RIVER	Popular Library	.60	2/3
Marric, J. J.	GIDEON'S WRATH	Popular Library	.60	2/3
Shannon, Dell	KNAVE OF HEARTS	Pyramid	.75	3/15
Symons, Julian	THE MAN WHO KILLED HIMSELF	Popular Library	.60	2/3
Taylor, Phoebe Atwood	BANBURY BOG	Pyramid	.60	2/15
Taylor, Phoebe Atwood	FIGURE AWAY	Pyramid	.60	3/15

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH
recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

For March, friends and brethren, your mentor has quite an encouraging report. As he sits down at the typewriter to communicate, the old man remembers that last month he could find only one first-class new book, which had to be supported by three paperback reprints. This month it's the other way round: three new items and only one reprint. So who's complaining? Three out of four were paradise enow. Four out of four has actually happened, but is an experience so rare and pleasant that it will probably be forbidden by the Supreme Court.

Merchants of Menace, An Anthology of Mystery Stories by the Mystery Writers of America, Edited by Hillary Waugh (Doubleday, $5.95) is the twenty-fourth collection of tales from certain homicidal ladies and gentlemen whose calling I am proud to share. Each anthology has been good, despite one handicapped with an introduction by your obedient servant; some have been outstanding. *Merchants of Menace* belongs among the outstanding.

Let me confess that I most enjoyed Lawrence Treat's *H As In Homicide* and Miriam Allen de Ford's *Farewell to the Faulkners.* Each, in addition to being a good story about credible people, is an ingenious detective problem with all clues on display. The editor-in-chief of this magazine also scores heavily with *The President's Half Disme,* a George Washington riddle in which evidence has been provided both by the Father of His Country and by Parson Weems.

If such preferences may be considered a matter of taste, you will find something here for every mood of taste. Stanley Ellin *(Death on Christmas Eve)* shows us a different kind of surprise ending; Robert Bloch *(The Real Bad Friend)* supplies diabolism for which the word 'sneaky' may be used as high praise; Cornell Woolrich *(The Moon of Montezuma)* contributes modern menace thick with atmosphere in old Mexico. *The Peppermint-Striped Goodbye,* by Ron Goulart, is a scathing parody of our tough private eye. There are twenty stories; you can't go wrong with any.

In *Somebody Owes Me Money,* by Donald E. Westlake (Random House, $4.50), as in other books by Mr. Westlake, we meet the well-meaning but unlucky young man who, caught up in wild events beyond his control, at the moment of crisis proves himself to be

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anything but the hopeless mug his conduct might sometimes indicate.

This time it's Chester Conway, New York taxi-driver and compulsive gambler. Having put his modest stake on a longshot horse which wins at twenty-seven to one, Chet has no wish but to collect. Since someone has shot down the bookie with dum-dum bullets, his prospect of collecting seems remote; and still more remote when with Abbie McKay, the beautiful blonde dealer from Las Vegas, he flees across Manhattan before two rival gangs who can agree only on the necessity for eliminating Chet Conway.

So much broad comedy must not obscure the fact that *Somebody Owes Me Money* is a good mystery of sound construction. The author is never merely skylarking; events at their most outrageous have form, pattern, and an explanation behind them. Verdict: an unpretentious winner.

Before you have finished *Gideon's Power,* by J.J. Marric (Harper & Row, $4.95), you will learn much more about Commander George Gideon, C.I.D., about his family and his associates as well as about the tangle of criminal cases whose threads lie across his desk: sabotage at London's power stations, child rape and murder, a man serving life for a crime of which he may be innocent.

The Gideon novels are too much human documents, and contain too much classic detection, to be tagged as mere 'police procedure' or anything run-of-the-mill. This latest, combining sensational denouement with homely domestic finale, proves Mr. Creasey, disguised as J.J. Marric, the master story-teller he has always been.

In *Ashenden,* by W. Somerset Maugham (Avon, 95¢), perhaps *the* master story-teller wrote a classic of espionage over forty years ago. I first read Ashenden about 1928, unable to resist the advertising lure, "Death Walks in Evening-Clothes Behind the British Lines", and many besides myself must welcome a new edition in paperback. With scenes ranging from Switzerland to Russia during World War I, these spy stories are the real thing.

Though we find no tricks or twists except the tricks or twists of human nature, human nature itself can be as unexpected and as startling as any crafty device for committing murder or conveying secret information. At the end of one adventure Ashenden cries out, "You bloody fool, you've killed the wrong man." At the end of the whole chronicle, after so many different characters have provided their various surprises, it will be a rare reader who does not say to himself, "You fortunate son of a so-and-so, you've got the right book."

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a *NEW* crime-detective story by

ANTHONY GILBERT

The narrator of this haunting story first saw her in The Flaming Angel in the Cathedral town of St. Ninian. She looked strangely rugged and weather-beaten; her great-grandmother, she claimed, had been drowned for a witch and the "gift" had descended to her—the power of second sight. He always thought of her as "Miss Muffett."

But it was really the legend of St. Ninian that had the haunting, magnetic, fantastic quality—the tolling bell, the phantom coach, the smell, the death "by misadventure" that so many considered to have been murder . . .

Do you *believe in "old wives' tales"?*

DOOR TO A DIFFERENT WORLD

by ANTHONY GILBERT

SHE WAS THE FIRST PERSON I saw when I entered the bar of The Flaming Angel; sitting in a corner, erect and intent, an empty glass before her and a number of sketches on the table, she seemed scarcely larger than a child. I wondered if it was her very insignificance that made her so noticeable.

Yet there was nothing childish about her appearance. She had what could best be called a rugged face, strong-featured and weather-beaten, but what the big nose and straight mouth lacked in symmetry they atoned for in character. It's only fair to add that no one except me seemed to be aware of her existence. Her short hair was tied up by what looked like a bootlace, and her clothes seemed to have been thrown on in the dark. I couldn't think what she was doing in this rather upper-class hotel in a cathedral town.

Not that I often find myself in such surroundings, but I have

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the chance to do a bread-and-butter book on English Cathedrals, their history and legends, and St. Ninian was the last on my list. One thing, I decided, climbing on a stool bar, she made the ultra-respectable couples and demure spinsters, all sitting at their separate tables, look like dead ducks.

"Don't they ever speak to one another?" I asked the barmaid, ordering a Scotch and inviting her to have whatever she fancied for herself.

"Mind if I have the same as you?" she asked. "Who, them? How can they? They've never been introduced. I tell you, if it wasn't for my regulars—they'll be along presently—I'd feel I'd got into Madame Tussaud's."

I'd heard a lot of worse analogies. Waxworks just about summed them up.

The regulars arrived as I ordered my second Scotch. It says a lot for the quality of the drinks that they came here at all, I thought, but they were clearly at home. They called the barmaid Mavis and demanded their Usuals. Not wanting to feel the outsider I moved away, looking round the small bar-lounge. But there were no empty tables. Even the two spinsters—bishops' sisters and daughters, I decided—preferred their own company.

There was a dark young chap, wearing his hair *en brosse,* at the table next to Miss Muffett, as I thought of her, and I moved slowly in his direction. He seemed preoccupied with papers, filling in forms that were spread all over the table. But before I had a chance to approach him my old girl, Miss Muffett, looked up—I'd put her down as anywhere between 45 and 60, but her eyes were as bright as a robin's and her manner was, as Yeats might have put it, like a wave of the sea.

She touched the second chair at her table. "Of course," she said, as though I had spoken. "I was willing you to come here. It's nice to know I haven't lost my powers."

It was such an odd introduction that for a moment I was speechless.

"Powers?" I murmured, "Powers? Powers?" It was like a gramophone record, when the needle's stuck.

"My great-grandmother was drowned for a witch," she told me. "Oh, do sit down. Fortunately she left descendants and the gift comes through the female line. I don't mean that I can work spells or anything like that, but we're supposed to have second sight and magnetic qualities."

I looked at her to see if she was joking, but she was as solemn as all-get-out.

"Let me get you something to drink," I offered, but she said,

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"No hurry, it'll do when you get your next." Then she frowned a bit and said, "I've seen you somewhere before, haven't I?"

"Only if you really have second sight," I told her. I knew I'd never set eyes on her in my life.

"It'll come back to me," she prophesied. "I never forget a face."

"It's my first visit here," I volunteered. I thought it was likely to be my last. "Do you—have you been here long?"

Frankly she hardly looked as though she could afford the pretty stiff charges of The Flaming Angel.

"I'm doing research into the origins of a kind of fern that's been discovered—rediscovered, rather—in Shaps Wood. I was up there this afternoon making sketches. Tomorrow I shall take photographs."

A teacher, I supposed, but as though she really did read my thoughts she observed coolly, "No, I'm a field worker—a botanist, an explorer, if you like. I don't know enough yet to teach. The reappearance of this plant after a whole century is really very exciting. If I could work spells I'd go backwards in time to the beginning of creation and watch the world unfold—but even my great-grandmother couldn't have worked that miracle."

When I went to the bar for refills the regulars were in full cry. They were now discussing funerals. I couldn't help reflecting it would be a pretty lively funeral that any of them attended.

"When I go", a not-quite young girl in a square-necked green dress was saying, "I don't want any wreaths or mourning bands or any of that poppycock. I just want all my pals to put away a double and say, 'We don't know where she is now, but wherever it is, good luck to her'."

"When I was a boy," capped the oldest member of the party, "the old Lady of the Manor was a real sport—rode to hounds wet or fine and knew more four-letter words than most men. When she died she left £100 in her will to provide free drinks for all the village so long as the cash lasted. If she'd been a saint we'd have forgotten her long ago, but that one's memory will never fade."

"They seem to be enjoying themselves," I remarked to Miss Muffett setting down the glasses. They could be heard all over the bar, but the other residents—you had to admire them—behaved as though the regulars didn't exist.

Miss Muffett frowned. "They should have more respect for death," she declared. "How do they know it's not for one of them the bell will toll tonight?"

"The bell?" I repeated—the gramophone record again.

"The one for whom the coach came," was her mystifying reply.

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"I don't get you," I confessed.

"I wondered," she told me, not in the least flummoxed by my surprise. "If you heard it, I mean."

"Why should I?" I'd no idea at all what she meant.

"While you were getting the drinks I remembered where I'd seen you. It was on Shap's Cliff this afternoon."

I was a bit taken aback. "Is that its name?" I murmured. "Yes, I walked over from Burnside—but I didn't see you."

"I was in those woods—they belong to the National Trust, you know—and I saw you going towards St. Ninian's. That's why I wondered—about the coach, I mean. Because it was quite soon after that I heard it."

"You're not going to persuade me the local authorities allow coaches to be driven over that cliff," I protested. "It would be murder."

And she foxed me again by answering, "Some people say it was."

I saw there was a story here that might have something to do with St. Ninian's—not the cathedral, of course, but the town itself; so I encouraged her to go on talking. And however fantastic the story may sound, I tell you she believed every word of it.

"Everyone knows there are pockets of remote countrysides all over England that are still said to be haunted," she assured me. "St. Ninian's is one of them. The legend, as I suppose you'd call it, though it's all in the local history books, is that about one hundred years ago a coach, filled to capacity and driven by a man named Thomas Shaps, came to grief on that cliff one dark night and the whole kit and caboodle went overboard. No one can be sure what happened because there were no survivors. They didn't find the coach till morning when the tide went down—the high tides here are notorious; the water comes boiling up against the cliffs and almost seems to turn the air to water, the foam is so powerful—no one would have a chance. The official verdict was 'death by misadventure,' but there were plenty of people to say that murder would be nearer the truth. And, of course, the legend bears out that view."

I pinched my arm to remind myself this was the scientific age, the technological era, and I was a contemporary man. We know now there's nothing incapable of a rational explanation. All the same I heard myself ask her what the legend was.

"Oh, from time to time the coach is heard driving up the side of the wood and onto the cliff—there's been a lot of erosion in the past century, of course—and if you have the nerve to wait you'll hear the crash as

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it goes into the sea. It's only heard at high tide, of course."

"Heard?" I murmured fascinated. "Not seen?"

"Hearing's enough," she assured me. "It comes up with a rolling of wheels and straining of bits—one theory was that, the night being dark and rainy, the nearside leader may have slipped and pulled the rest of the team with him; but the generally expressed view is that Tom Shaps stayed too long at The Fiddler's Cat—that was the name of the old coaching inn; unfortunately, they've pulled that down to make way for a housing development."

"So he can't rest in his tomb but has to do penance," I exclaimed. "Ye Gods, it would take a religious community to think up a revenge like that. For how long—?"

"They say till world's end, though you and I aren't likely to be able to prove the truth of that, are we?"

"Who started the legend?" I asked skeptically.

"I suppose the first person who heard the coach. It's unmistakeable. It's not just the sound, you know. There's the smell."

"The smell of death?" I asked.

"If you were brought up among horses as I was—my father would have sold the house over our heads to keep the stables in repair—you'd never forget that smell. And there was the other smell, the smell of fear, which is even more terrifying. Animals often have an extrasensory power—"

"Meaning they knew they were headed for disaster?"

"I often wonder why men think they're superior to animals," Miss Muffet observed, "particularly these days when most men have abandoned all spiritual beliefs. What the animals have may not be second sight but it serves them nearly as well."

"Perhaps you need second sight to be able to hear it," I suggested. "I heard nothing. But, of course, my timing may have been wrong. Is it supposed to mean anything special?"

"It's said to be a warning of sudden death, not necessarily to the person who hears it but to someone in his or her aura."

I'm as tough as the next man, but I did actually feel a shiver down my spine. I knew that if someone in this room was found dead tomorrow, no matter how natural the cause, Miss Muffett would put her own interpretation on it. I noticed the young man at the next table watching us rather intently, though when he caught my eye he turned back hurriedly to his papers.

"If you're out on the cliffs again," her strange voice continued, "you'll notice no ships come close in. Of course, you've never

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seen the rocks at low tide, have you?"

I shook my head.

"They're like witches's teeth, huge and black. It's a good thing the water was high that night or the rocks would have torn them apart. But they couldn't have lasted more than a minute or two in that boiling sea."

I don't mind admitting it was a relief when the tables began to empty and the occupants moved toward the dining room. I envied the rowdy party still at the bar. Even the air seemed to have turned cold. In the dining room we were separated, Miss Muffett in one corner and I at the table against the wall at the far end; but after dinner we took coffee together in the bar.

"What does one do here in the evening?" I inquired.

"There's a television lounge," she said. "I think a lot of them go there. The rest just stay about till the bar closes and then, I suppose, they go to bed."

"And which do you do?"

"I go out if it's fine, just for a walk round the town."

Hoping to see more ghosts, I supposed. She gave me the impression she wouldn't turn a hair if she met an army of them. I noticed that the dark young man had disappeared. He hadn't come into dinner—I'd noticed that too. It came out later that he wasn't even staying in the hotel.

"You remember Sir Walter Scott?" Miss Muffett asked. "'Who would view fair Melrose aright, Should visit it by the pale moonlight.' St. Ninian's is the same. It's a lovely city even by daylight, but when the moon's out, as it is tonight, and there's hardly anyone about, there's a sort of magic—all those beautiful houses with their bow windows and exquisite gateways—oh, I count myself lucky to have been born before they, too, are demolished in the interests of progress. They floodlight the Cathedral, you know—it's like going through a door to a different world."

"You want to be a bit careful," I warned her. And she laughed. It was disconcerting to hear such a youthful, such a merry laugh, coming from that weather-beaten face.

"Are you thinking of the legend? But if the coach came for me I couldn't avoid the summons even if I never stirred foot outside The Flaming Angel for the next twenty-four hours. Anyway, who would want to harm an old girl like me? Sometimes I hardly see a soul, not even the sly ghost of a Rural Dean." This time I didn't have to be told the source of the quotation. I thought you might as well try to control the high tides at Shap's Cliff —they'd thought a lot of their driver to name the Cliff after him, I decided—as dissuade her, once

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her mind was made up.

I saw her go out soon afterward, a muffler round her neck, a scarf over her bootlaced hair. My only surprise was that she didn't depart on a broomstick. I didn't stay in myself either. She'd been right about one thing, there was little to do in St. Ninan's of an evening. I passed the cinema — they have only one—which was showing a film I'd already seen, and the local repertory which—believe it or not—was doing a repeat of "Dear Octopus." I wandered round the moony streets and ended up in The Cupid and Dolphin, where you can see the floodlit Cathedral from the bar. I decided they thought the name of the place and the view were enough jointly to compensate for the indifferent quality of the beer.

I came back by a short cut through the churchyard; clouds were beginning to amble through the sky like a flock of lazy sheep and the moon dipped in and out like a speedboat. I'd plenty to occupy my mind. This would be virtually my last trip as a bachelor. I'd had a lively past, but at 40 you're not a young man any more and I knew it was time to settle down. In marrying Averil I'd be saying goodbye to all footloose adventure, but in its place I'd be getting security, and though bread-and-butter is good wholesome fare there are times when you hunger for a piece of cake, even wedding cake.

As I say, I came home by the short cut through the churchyard. The Cathedral looked magnificent, of course—none of our modern structures can touch the old with their tall steeples pointing man's way to Heaven. The place was full of shadows spiked with silver. I thought our ancestors must have had a pretty firm belief in the resurrection of the body and an equally firm intention that the dead shouldn't rise before their time, judging by the way they had sealed them underground. Some of those tombs were as solid and wide as tables. In fact, I believe visitors sometimes used them as such, bringing their picnic lunches into the holy precincts. I couldn't see much harm in it myself. Why on earth should the dead care? In the dark depths where they've been lying for generations they wouldn't hear the voices and the laughter.

The bar at The Flaming Angel was closed when I got in—they keep early hours at St. Ninian's—but the night porter offered to send a whiskey-and-soda to my room. I was grateful to him.

"Turns nippy of a night," he said, "though there's some behave as though there's no difference between sun and moon."

I knew with an uncanny cer-

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titude that he was referring to Miss Muffett.

I came down to breakfast a bit late. A number of residents clearly had this meal in their rooms. I met my waiter with a tray on his shoulder and there were a few trays outside doors. He gave me an abstracted "Good morning" as he tapped on Number 9.

Only three tables were occupied in the dining room. Miss Muffett's was empty.

"Coffee, porridge, and kipper," I told my waiter when he came hurrying over. "Quiet this morning, isn't it?"

He gave me an odd look. "You haven't heard, sir? The news?"

"I haven't seen a paper this morning."

"I didn't mean the national news. It's Miss Vibart."

"Who?" I asked.

"You were talking to her last night."

"That one?" I said. "We didn't get as far as exchanging names. Why, what's happened? I see she isn't down."

"Oh, no, sir, and she won't be coming down. We shall miss her and that's a fact, though she was never much of a one for talking. Eccentric, you could say. But quite a name in her own field, I understand."

I felt my fingers grip the table edge. "What are you trying to tell me? That she's dead?" That's what the medicos call shock treatment.

The waiter looked reproachful. "Oh, no, sir. If it were just that. She's not just dead, she's been murdered."

Some words jumped out of my mouth, I can't recall what they were. The waiter went on. "It was one of the Cathedral vergers found her, going to open up for the early service, lying in the shade of the Bentham tomb . . . Coffee, you said, sir, porridge, and kipper."

I was startled at his sudden change of manner till I realized that the owner had come into the room. He was a big dark chap who had been in the Navy during the war and still clung to his title of Commander.

"I see Henry's been acting as bush telegraph," he said. And stopped in momentary embarrassment as if I might suspect he was making a pun about my name, which is Bush. "You were talking to her last night, I believe."

"We had a drink together in the bar, though I didn't at first realize who your waiter was talking about." Somehow as a name Miss Vibart suited her much less than Miss Muffett. "She was telling me about hearing the coach—of course to most people it's only a legend, but I'll swear she—" I stopped there, because

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a peculair expression had come over the man's face. "Oh, come," I protested, "you're not going to tell me you believe an old wives' tale like that."

"You're a townsman, Mr. Bush," he said. "I daresay it's hard for legends to survive in the middle of bricks and mortar, but I've knocked around the world a lot in my time, and I've seen a lot of things you can't explain by logic. Believe it or not, there are still drivers—mostly among the older men—who won't take their trucks over the cliff road after dark."

"Haunted pockets of the countryside," I recalled, as my waiter hurried back with coffee and porridge. "That's what she was saying last night. I'll tell you this, though, she believed in that legend as good men believe in Holy Writ; but it never occurred to her she might be the one—why, she laughed when I said it was a bit risky hanging about the place at night. 'Who'd want to harm an old girl like me?' she said." And I added abruptly, "Are they sure it wasn't an accident?"

"Oh, no," said the Commander softly, "it wasn't an accident. "You can't garrote yourself."

Presently he suggested that after breakfast I should call in at the police station. "Why?" I asked him, point-blank. "I can't tell them anything—unless you're suggesting that the phantom coach will count as evidence?"

He didn't laugh or turn impatient. He simply said, "They'll want to talk to anyone who might be able to help, and you were the last person she was seen talking to."

"In the hotel lobby," I reminded him. But, of course, I saw what he was driving at. He must have had the police down at The Flaming Angel at least once this morning, and another police visit might start some of his residents wondering if it wasn't time to make a change of residence. That kind of thing does a hotel no good.

I went along to the station after breakfast. "Commander Ainslie suggested I should look in," I told the sergeant on duty. "Though it's only fair to warn you I'd never set eyes on her before last night and she didn't tell me anything that's likely to be helpful to you."

"What did she tell you, sir?"

I explained about the ferns and her intention to go back to the cliff today with a camera, and then a bit hesitantly I repeated her story of the ghostly coach.

"I can promise you this," I added, "if anyone could make me believe a lot of flapdoodle like that she's the one who could do it." I remembered the warmth, the sincerity with which she'd described the sound of the thing, especially the clatter of horses'

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hoofs and the smell of fear. I think that had impressed me more than anything. You could invent the legend and the noise, including, I suppose, the splash, but there was an authenticity about the smell.

"On Shap's Cliff?" said the sergeant.

"Don't tell me it appears anywhere else?" I exclaimed.

"Will you wait a moment, sir?" the sergeant said. "I think the Chief Inspector would like a word with you."

"Oh, no," I almost shouted. "You're not going to tell me that he, too—"

"If you wouldn't mind waiting—" There was a young constable whom he left in charge during his absence.

"I feel as if I'd wandered into Disneyland or something," I blurted out. "You're not going to tell me that your—. Your generation is what I meant, of course.

"Oh, we don't set much store in legends, sir," agreed the young man. "All we can use is proof."

"It's good of you to have come, Mr. Bush," said the Chief Inspector, a smallish quite unimportant-looking man who'd never have been type-cast on TV as a Chief-Inspector. "We could do with a bit of help."

"I'm afraid I can't be of much use," I confessed.

"But you've helped us already," the Inspector said. "This is the first time we've heard that Miss Vibart was on Shap's Cliff yesterday afternoon. That alters the whole situation."

I shook my head, as if to clear it. "But she wasn't found there—she was found in the churchyard, or so I understood."

"Think back a minute, Mr. Bush," the Chief Inspector urged. "When she was telling you this—er—legend, was anyone else within earshot?"

"She wasn't speaking in a particularly low voice," I acknowledged. Then I thought of the dark young man who had been listening so intently. "I suppose he could have heard, though you could hardly blame him for listening. I mean"—it came out before I intended it to—"she claimed to be descended from a line of witches."

"Did you see him afterwards?"

"He didn't dine at the hotel and—no, I didn't see him. Why, what on earth has he got to do with Miss Vibart's death?"

"That's something we don't know yet, Mr. Bush. You see, since we saw the Commander we've had fresh news. Some fishermen going out to get mussels from the rocks at Shap's Cliff—you spoke?"

"No, no," I amended hastily. "I was just thinking of what Miss Vibart told me last night—like witches' teeth they were, she said."

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"It's not a bad description," acknowledge the Chief Inspector. "Well, these men found a body caught among the rocks." He gave a slight shiver. "It can't have been a very pleasant sight especially before breakfast. You've never seen the cliff at high tide?"

I explained I'd only arrived the day before.

"The tide recedes very fast, so the men come out as soon as the rocks are uncovered. We hadn't thought of tying up the two deaths till you mentioned Miss Vibart being on the cliff yesterday afternoon."

"But, great heavens, is there any evidence this man's death isn't an accident? He could have got dizzy, or slipped—" I stopped short of suggesting he might have been mowed down by the invisible coach.

"Oh, no, sir," the Inspector was saying. "We've ruled out accident. You see, it's hard to believe that a man can garrote himself."

A child could have followed their line of reasoning—to them it was a plain case of cause and effect. But if I hadn't gone to them with my story about Miss Muffett they'd either have put it down to coincidence or thought some psychopath was on the war-path. They made extensive inquiries about the dark young man in The Flaming Angel bar, but they never positively traced him. Someone who might have been the dark young man had left Harcourt Airport on a night flight—Harcourt's the airport that anyone traveling from St. Ninian would use—but the plane had crashed without survivors. They never learned anything of importance about the man on the plane. On the other hand, they found out quite a lot about the dead body.

His name was Beresford and he'd made his living in a variety of ways, most of them shady. There was a strong suspicion that among other activities he'd engaged in blackmail. I daresay a good many hearts beat more lightly when they learned he was dead.

"The blackmailer carries his life in his hand," the Chief Inspector remarked. "Sooner or later he gets careless and someone knocks him off. But that doesn't absolve us from putting a name to that someone."

They never did, though, and there are probably plenty of people who believe the anonymous young man in the bar was responsible, though there was never any actual evidence against him. He was simply another bird of passage, and now that he's dead why should he care what anyone thinks? No, I don't waste any pity on the man who died in the plane crash.

I don't waste any on Beresford

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either. He deserved everything he got—except that his death was a quicker and more merciful one than he deserved. Only the blackmailed know the anguish and fear they undergo, and I'd been in Beresford's power for the past three years. When my engagement to Averil was announced he shot up his terms to a figure only a millionaire could pay.

"But, my dear Willy," he had said, "when you're Mr. Averil Gordon you'll be a millionaire, and then you'll find my—percentage—is no more than a flea bite."

Words, words. Everyone knows that great oaks from little acorns grow and presently I'd find my whole body infested with fleas as his price went up and up . . . Averil was marrying me for love—well, for what else, to a not-very-successful, 40-year-old journalist, when she could, as they say, have had practically anyone; but like most wealthy people she'd led a sheltered life, and if she'd known as much about me as Beresford did she'd have broken the engagement. I remember my grandmother saying to me once, as we drove through the crowded streets in a downpour: "Oh, Willy, isn't it lovely to feel we're dry and warm with all those unfortunate people getting soaked?" And yet she wasn't a cruel woman. It's just a question of being born to the silver-spoon existence, so that you can barely hear the rain. I loved Averil—of course I did—but to me she was my lifeline as well as my love, and I couldn't afford to let her go.

It's an ironic thought that the rendezvous on Shap's Cliff was Bereford's own suggestion. He knew I was going to St. Ninian's—"So this," he had grinned, "will be nice and private." I can see him now standing on the cliff top, his hands in his pockets, his absurd College scarf round his throat, staring down at the sea.

"That's a fine sight, Willy," he had said. "All the same, I think I'll let you walk on the cliff side."

They say murder grows in the mind that way seeds grow in the dark. Impulsive murder is just a phrase—the will is already there—and so I suppose it was with me. Because I swear, when I came marching up that path, I'd no plan in my mind as to what my next step should be. But my mind knew more than I did. As he turned, still laughing, to make place for me, I caught his scarf and drew the ends tight. Once I'd started I couldn't have stopped even if I'd wanted to. He is—was—a small man, but dapper and full of conceit, the way so many criminals are. With the seas so high and the wind thrashing among the branches of the lower wood, even Miss Muffett could hardly have heard the splash as he went over. The Chief Inspector

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was right, I didn't know about those cliffs; I thought the body would be swept out to sea.

I didn't even feel any remorse as I walked toward St. Ninian's down the hill. How was I to guess that a witch's granddaughter—or great-granddaughter—stood, the invisible witness, among the trees, so still, so small she might have been one of them, but near enough to know me again? When the story broke, if it broke—*if it broke*—and she'd warned me about those cliffs, remember—oh, you do see I literally couldn't afford to let her live. The police have their own ways of substantiating their suspicions, and sooner or later they'd trace the connection, and though they don't hang you for murder any longer, a slow ten-year dying in a prison cell—no, I couldn't afford to let her live. I watched from the bar of The Cupid and Dolphin till I saw her come into the churchyard, so slight, so small, she might have been a ghost herself.

That's how I think of her nowadays—as a ghost. Her boasted second sight wasn't of much avail to her that night, but how do we ordinary mortals know the way second sight functions? If the spirit lives on, then she may still be waiting for me, free of the trammels of time, and so possessed of infinite patience.

Last year—all this happened five years ago—Averil wanted me to take her to St. Ninian's.

"It's not much of a detour, Willy." But I said we were already late and put my foot hard on the accelerator. Other people will have fogotten Miss Muffett long ago—only the police and I are like those elephants that are said never to forget. And what about her? If I went by that immense tomb where I left her, lying like a shadow in the grass, how can I be certain she wouldn't still be keeping her vigil?

"You've been a long time coming, Willy," she might say. "But I knew you'd come in the end."

I've taken a lot of chances in my life, but that's one chance I'll never take.

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a NEW detective story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Well, Lawrence Treat took up our challenge (as we were sure he would!) and turned The Forensic Club into the background for a new series of "inside stories." Once again you will find yourself in the comfortable, oak-paneled sanctum sanctorum of The Forensic Club, this time in the company of a police Inspector, a D.A., a judge, a prison doctor, and the lawyer-narrator; and once again an old, never fully solved case reveals its inner secrets . . .

On the surface it looks as if the aggressive, bone-crushing ex-football coach is the main character; but keep your eye on the little man, the meek, naive, dainty little man who had it in him, after a lifetime of placid, timid ways, to seize the opportunity by the bag and become a Big Man . . .

You'll find the Boston Bumbo Case engrossing . . .

THE HEART OF THE CASE

by LAWRENCE TREAT

HIS BODY LAY IN THE PRISON mortuary, dead from natural causes. He'd been a small, dainty man, with small hands and small feet. He'd worn a size six shoe, thirteen-and-a-half collar, and his face had taut, thin-skinned features. His nostrils were pink and delicate, his mouth was soft, and his lips were curved in innocence. Murderer? Him?

It was inevitable that we should hold some kind of post-mortem, for there were questions to be answered. It was five years after the event, and an autopsy of his psyche or, if you prefer, an impartial examination of his life and motives, was in order. And so we gathered in that comfortable oak-paneled lounge at the rear of the second floor of The Forensic Club, where whatever was said was confidential and remained

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within those arcane walls, locked, sealed, and bolted. To repeat it outside meant expulsion from the club, and *that* meant the end of a career—to which at least one ex-judge could sorrowfully attest.

So we sat *in camera,* so to speak, and we probed in the attempt to gather the shreds of truth and reconstruct the whole. Present were the prison doctor, the judge who had presided at the trial, the police inspector who had had charge of the case, the D.A. who had prosecuted, and myself. I'd defended him.

The Inspector led off. "You people have no idea of what I was up against when I walked into that hotel room five years ago. Here was Boston Bumbo dead. You never saw him alive, did you?"

The doctor, the judge, and I shook our heads. The D.A. spoke up. "His name alone scared people. He was a big, shaggy man who could break a bone with a handshake, and it's said that he'd done just that. Once to a guy who'd gypped him, or so he claimed, and once to a woman who—well, he had that scar on his face, so she got back at him. She aimed for his eye, and you could pun on that. I—ego. But she probably deserved what she got."

"Philosophical, aren't you?" I said.

"No, merely misogynous, but that has nothing to do with the case. There are no women in it."

"Except my wife," I said. They all looked at me in surprise. "She put the icing on the cake," I said, "but that part of the story comes later. It belongs near the end, so go ahead, Inspector. You were saying?"

His broad thick nostrils dilated with some kind of internal combustion at the mere thought of the Boston Bumbo case, and his voice rumbled with the distended phlegm of emotion. "Give me a husband or wife homicide," he said, "where I have suspects I can talk to. Or give me a straight gang killing or someone shot in the course of a burglary, and I'll eat it up. I'll know where to start. I have my M.O. files and my stoolies, and I can take it from there. But a man like Boston Bumbo, with personal enemies, professional enemies, and all kinds of underworld connections—gambling, extortion, maybe the Mafia—where do you start?"

"About this Boston Bumbo," the judge said meekly. Although he'd slept through part of that trial, for some reason he'd failed to make any glaring errors of law on which I could base a successful appeal. Still, with his heavy brows and piercing eyes and granite features, he looked every inch a judge, and that's what counts. He lent dignity to a courtroom. Since his juridical knowledge was min-

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imal and his curiosity maximal, he listened open-mindedly to the learned arguments delivered by both sides. Most attorneys respected him and liked to have him sit.

"About this Boston Bumbo," he said. "He'd been a successful football coach, hadn't he?"

The D.A. nodded. "Successful enough—he'd even won a championship. He was famous for his answer to a reporter who once asked him the secret of his success. 'One man on the other team,' he was supposed to have said."

The judge cupped his ear. "Ah!" he said.

The D.A. explained. "Bribe somebody on the other side to tip off the plays, and you can stop them every time."

"Dishonest," the judge said.

For a moment we stared at him in silent admiration. Then the Inspector resumed his story. "He'd been coach until a few days before his death," he said. "Then he'd been let go quietly, because of his gambling connections and because he'd tried to bribe the wrong man. He'd gone about it circumspectly, for he was experienced at it, but he'd been found out. Now he'd come here to see the big game as a private individual.

"I started out with the gun, which was lying there beside him. It belonged to him and he had a permit for it. He'd flown here on American Airlines and checked in at his hotel at six p.m. At six fifteen he'd made a phone call to the Hilton, which was as far as I could follow through on that.

"Then I examined his bag, an expensive pigskin thing, and that was the eye-opener. He had the play-book for one of the teams that was due to play on the following Sunday. Complete diagrams of all their plays, together with the signals for each. Worth a million dollars to a gambling ring, and that made the homicide twice as strange. Because the way I figured it, he'd been shot for that play-book, but then—why hadn't his killer taken the book?"

"It was only valuable to somebody who knew how and where to sell it," I said.

The Inspector nodded. "Sure, but we have to investigate every angle. We start with the probable and then take up the improbable. A good investigator is a thorough investigator."

He made his pronouncement as if he expected us all to bow our heads in humble appreciation of his superior wisdom. But instead of an accolade he got polite disinterest. He reacted by stepping up his voice to an aggressive roar.

"I had to check every major gambling ring," he almost bellowed, "and that took time and brought me nothing. With the help of my staff I interviewed over

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two hundred people. I spoke to every bellhop and every elevator operator in the hotel, and still got nowhere. I got hold of the passenger list of the plane that Boston Bumbo had come in on, and I checked it against every name in the Hilton registry, because that's where Boston Bumbo had phoned to. I came up with one duplicate name. Wells. Oscar Wells was on both lists, but who was he? Descriptions of him were a week old by then and practically worthless. The airlines had one address for him and the Hilton had another, but they both turned out to be false, so where was I? Climbing an imaginary rope to a nonexistent launching platform. Me, a cop!"

"Worse than that," the D.A. said, "the trail of a man who apparently had followed Boston Bumbo, traveled on the same plane, and then gone to his hotel and shot him, and who'd registered under a false name and false address—it added up to a hired killer, didn't it?"

"That's right." the Inspector said. "It made a pretty familiar stereotype, but by the time I got to the Hilton the trail was cold. Nobody remembered a man named Wells. He had been at the hotel for a couple of days, but since then his room had been occupied by other people, so there was no physical evidence I could get hold of. No fingerprints, no hair, nothing. And I wasn't even sure that this was my man. The coincidence of being on the same plane with Boston Bumbo and in the same hotel that Bumbo made a phone call to—it was pretty slim, but it was all I had, so I stuck with it.

"The evidence of the elevator man in Boston Bumbo's hotel came a week late, and it came the way a lot of evidence does—an anonymous call. We check out hundreds of them. Most of them are crank stuff, or else somebody's trying to get somebody else in trouble. Sometimes there's value, but usually not. I figured this call came from a bellhop who was having some sort of vendetta with the elevator man. Something to do with tips, maybe. There are all kinds of tricks, and they can cut each other's throat over that, if they want to. Anyhow, I got this anonymous tip that an elevator operator named Louis Lewis knew something about the Boston Bumbo case.

"I had the boy brought down to headquarters. That usually scares 'em. Most of 'em have been to reform school or been arrested for something or other. They all bring in call girls and after-hours liquor and stuff like that, so they're all vulnerable. I scare 'em and then I say that if they tell me what they know, they can walk out of my office and not worry.

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"Louis' story was that, around even p.m. on the evening of the homicide, a small man carrying an expensive pigskin bag got in the elevator and gave Louis fifty dollars to take him out the back way so that he wouldn't have to walk through the lobby. The explanation he gave was that his wife and a private detective were in the lobby waiting to slap him with divorce papers, and that he'd been upstairs with a woman and didn't want her brought into the case. Louis didn't believe him, but how often do you get a fifty-dollar tip?

"I didn't place much confidence in Louis being able to remember what the man looked like, and I wasn't sure that this was really our man, but we worked on an identification nevertheless. You know the technique—we give Louis sketches of a man with a long nose, a short nose, curved, straight, hooked, broad, thin, and so on. He picks the kind of nose this man had. Then we do the same thing with mouth, chin, eyes, shape of face, and from the conglomerate an artist reconstructs the probable appearance of the suspect.

"I got hold of one more piece of evidence I could sink my teeth into. The airline hostess." The Inspector clamped his jaws as if he was actually biting into her. He unclenched with an audible click. "It took those fancy, high-powered, big-salaried airline executives a month to locate her and bring her here, and by that time she had no idea what this Wells looked like. But Boston Bumbo was different. He had a voice like a foghorn and he made everybody know it when he was around, so she remembered him. He'd sat next to a little guy and they'd had drinks and got to talking. Real palsy-walsy, she said, with the runt getting looped, she thought. But what he looked like, whether he resembled this sketch I had—she couldn't be sure."

The Inspector snorted to show what he thought of airline hostesses, football coaches, and maybe all the rest of us. "And that's as far as I got for the time being," he said. "A sketch of somebody who got into the elevator at Boston Bumbo's floor, who carried an expensive pigskin bag that looked like Bumbo's, and who paid the operator fifty bucks to sneak him out the back way. That was solid evidence, and essentially it was the evidence in the trial itself."

"There was mention of a larger sum of money," the judge said. "After due consideration I excluded evidence thereto."

"Forty thousand dollars," the Inspector said angrily. "The heart of the case. Forty thousand dollars, and I couldn't even tell the jury about it."

"You saw the money?" the

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judge said mildly. "You could prove that the deceased actually had it?"

"Everybody knew about it," the Inspector said. "The underworld was full of rumors, and what they added up to was that Boston Bumbo'd had forty thousand in cold cash—he'd been given it on the basis of the play-book. If he could plant it in the right places, he was to bet the roll. But instead of that he got killed and the money disappeared. And it was pretty obvious that if a professional had done the job and kept the money for himself, he'd have been located and rubbed out. When that didn't happen, I decided that an amateur had somehow or other heard about the dough and killed Bumbo for it."

The Inspector exhaled irritably, and the curtains on the other side of the room moved slightly with the flow of his breath. "The dough?" he said. "Sure he had it, and as for Wells, I saw that name and that reconstructed face in my dreams. I woke up with it and went to sleep with it. And then one afternoon about a year ago an airport guard called to say he'd caught somebody at the baggage pickup trying to make off with the wrong bag, and that the guy acted suspiciously and did we want to check up on him. Name of Pooey."

The judge, who fancied himself a linguist, came to life. "A peculiar name," he remarked, "until you realize that the French word for *well* is *puit,* mispronounced Pooey. Most of us manhandle a foreign language and flatten it out in the American fashion. Can anyone here, for instance, roll an r?" None of us tried, and the judge shook his head sadly. "Pooey—Wells. He was no linguist, this man. His real name was Tiefenbrunnen, which means *deep springs* in German. All quite elementary, although I've never understood why people choose aliases that always relate to their original names. Self-defeating, in the long run."

Nobody was inclined to join the judge in speculating on the irrelevant. The Inspector cleared his throat and said, "Of course. The connection hit me right off." He paused long enough to make sure his nonexistent knowledge of languages wouldn't be challenged. But we were interested in the story, and if the Inspector wanted to take credit for a process of ratiocination that he was incapable of, we were willing to let him maintain that fiction. He continued with his account.

"I told them to hold the man at the airport and I'd be right over. As soon as I saw him I identified him from our artist's picture, and that's how I finally caught up with Tiefenbrunnen."

It had been sound police work,

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and the Inspector knew it. He got up now, replenished the glasses from the ice bucket, then poured each of us a generous drink. He swished his around and listened to the ice tinkle.

"I felt pretty pleased with myself at the time, except—where was the forty thousand dollars?" He turned to me. "You fought to keep any mention of it out of the trial, and you must have had pretty good reasons for suppressing it. I hear you ended up with a nice fat fee, so I figure you got hold of part of that money. Where was it?"

"I fought to keep that testimony out in order to help my client," I corrected him. "And you yourself admitted a minute ago that the only 'evidence' concerning the money consisted of rumors. So the evidence was hearsay, and properly excluded."

"The court appointed you as his attorney," the Inspector said.

"Right," I said. "Wells had no funds, no savings. He was working as a clerk in one of those Army-Navy outlet stores and he was making five thousand a year. Nobody would take his case for less than ten thousand, which he didn't have, and the court appointed me to represent him. I was losing money on him. My time, out-of-pocket disbursements, costs of bringing in witnesses—"

"He was an indigent," the Inspector said, interrupting, "but nevertheless you collected plenty. I'm asking how you got hold of that money of his."

"Just listen," I said. "Quietly."

"I'm asking—" he began angrily, but he broke off when the judge spoke.

"Attorney for the defense," he said, "came to my chambers and stated that a fee was forthcoming on behalf of his client, and that it was no longer necessary for the State to subsidize the defense. I commended him for his probity, and I took the necessary steps to relieve the State of its liability."

"Wells," I said, "did not pay me. When I first spoke to him he claimed he knew nothing about the money, had never seen or heard of Boston Bumbo, and couldn't understand why he was being charged with homicide. He said that whoever sat next to Boston Bumbo, it wasn't he. I'd like to point out that it was not up to me to believe or disbelieve Wells. It is the function of the jury to decide guilt or innocence. My job was to defend him to the best of my ability, and the first order of business was to hear his story. It proved to be simple enough.

"He lived alone, in Chicago. He lived simply, without luxuries. I checked, and I couldn't find even a hint that he spent anything over his salary." I turned to the D.A. "You investigated, too, and you found nothing suspicious."

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The D.A. said, "Correct."

"I didn't put him on the stand," I said, "but I guess you know what he would have said. He had a sister who'd married wealth, and once a year he came here to visit her. He always flew in, stayed at a good hotel, and had dinner with her and her husband. He did this on the evening of the murder. The rest of his time here he went sightseeing. He saw nobody in particular and couldn't prove where he'd been, but that's perfectly natural. It would have been suspicious if he *had* been able to document his visit.

"I called his sister, a Mrs. Dunbarry, and told her that her brother was in trouble, and that I was representing him and she'd better come to see me. She said she knew of his trouble but she saw no reason for my dragging her into it. I told her to be at my office at eleven o'clock the next morning.

"She came. She was wearing twenty-thousand dollars worth of jewelry, a thousand-dollar wig, and her clothes came from Bergdorf Goodman. When I see people like that, I have an impulse to share the wealth.

"Many people would call her beautiful. She was tall and well-built, her features were good and they were in proportion, but she repelled me. Her inside nature came out, if you know what I mean. Selfishness, coldness—the way some people's virtue shines through them, her prettiness bristled. She offered me five thousand dollars to keep her name out of the case. She said she didn't even want to see her brother. She said that he foisted himself on her and her husband once a year, and bored them through a long evening. She was ashamed of her brother and wanted no part of him. Five thousand dollars worth of rejection, and well worth it to her.

"We had a fruitful conversation about money. In the course of it she went as high as offering me twenty-five thousand dollars if I got her brother off, because she didn't want a convict in the family. I mentioned the possibility of serving her with a subpoena to bring her into court, although I think she would have created a prejudice against, rather than any sympathy for him. She seemed to think that getting a subpoena was shameful.

"This is all among friends, you understand, and I admit frankly that I twisted her arm, but only from the purest of motives. It was in the public interest that Mrs. Dunbarry pay for the defense of her brother, and she did. As for the forty thousand that the killer of Boston Bumbo must have gotten, I saw none of it—not one penny."

"It's what killed my case," the D.A. said bitterly. "An acquit-

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tal—and I must say I didn't expect it."

He paused, and we both thought back to that moment when the jury had filed back into the courtroom and been asked that crucial question.

"How do you find?"

"We find the defendant Not Guilty."

The D.A. glared at me now as if I'd been responsible for a miscarriage of justice. "I was hoping you'd put him on the stand, instead of shutting him up and merely letting him sit there next to you. The little fraud even looked innocent."

"I realized that," I said blandly. "And as for testimony regarding the money, I think I had you beaten either way. Keep any mention of it out of the trial—and there was no apparent motive. Introduce it—and the jury would wonder what happened to it. But you were convinced he was guilty, weren't you?"

"Absolutely," the D.A. said without hesitation. "That's why I went ahead and prosecuted him on the burglary charge—for attempting to steal that bag at the airport years later. He'd gone straight to the baggage pickup and grabbed the first piece of luggage that resembled his. It was a black fiber case, nothing like the pigskin bag that he'd owned at the time of the murder. So he was wide-open on a burglary charge, and you knew it. Otherwise you wouldn't have pleaded him guilty."

"I had no choice," I said. "He went to prison for two years, and that's the last I saw of him."

"I got to know him there," the prison doctor said. "He was one of two inmates who died of Hong Kong flu, and towards the end he was delirious and blabbed out pieces of a story. He was obsessed with the idea of a giant there in the room, and he'd scream out that he needed a gun to protect himself. Then he'd calm down and start preaching, and I wondered who the audience was supposed to be; the sermon was always full of advice about honesty and thrift and the rewards of hard work.

"Between what you people have told me and what Tiefenbrunnen poured out, I think I can reconstruct the murder and what led up to it. It starts on the plane where, as the airline hostess stated, Boston Bumbo happened to sit next to a little man. There they were—Boston Bumbo, a big, aggressive, overwhelming man whose name was familiar to every football fan, and little Tiefenbrunnen, meek, naive, hoping for an adventure. And he certainly found it.

"They had a couple of drinks together, and under the influence of them Tiefenbrunnen probably babbled out his life story—who he was, where he lived, how he

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was coming to visit his sister and was stopping at an expensive hotel. Using a false name and phony address because it was always more exciting, more glamorous that way. As if he were a secret agent. And while Bumbo must have basked in the little man's flattery, over and above that, Bumbo must have seen that here was the perfect patsy if and when he ever needed one. So Bumbo cultivated him and they parted friends.

"You can imagine Tiefenbrunnen's surprise and then shock when he got into his hotel room, opened the bag, and saw what was inside. The money, the gun, and the play-book which nobody except a team member had any right to have. And when Tiefenbrunnen was dying, there in the prison hsopital, he kept reliving those terrible moments when he realized his danger. Bumbo knew his name and address, the real ones, and could run him down and make sure Tiefenbrunnen never breathed a word about the stolen play-book. There was no possible escape for him, and he was terror-stricken. His knees shook and his heart hammered and he could hardly breathe. He was a little man who'd never done anything daring or courageous in his life. But suddenly, in an uncontrollable impulse of greed, he wanted that forty-thousand dollars—wanted it desperately.

"Then the phone rang, and it was Boston Bumbo saying he had Tiefenbrunnen's bag by mistake, and did Tiefenbrunnen have his?

"What makes a terrified little man suddenly turn crafty? Where did Tiefenbrunnen get the strength to formulate and carry out a daring plan and speak the right words? I have often wondered. But somehow or other his glands went to work and his voice became steady and he said he hadn't opened the bag yet, and was Bumbo sure? Bumbo said he was damn sure and he'd be right over, but Tiefenbrunnen said he was on his way out to see his sister and he'd bring the bag to Bumbo. What was Bumbo's room number?

"You're a professional," the doctor said, turning to the Inspector. "You know that a man has to be lucky in order to get away with a major crime, and Tiefenbrunnen must have been moving under a lucky star all that evening. He put the gun in his pocket—his plan was fully formed by now—and except for a few bills he left the money in Bumbo's bag. He was afraid he'd be stopped, walking out of the hotel with luggage, so he went to the desk and explained that he wasn't trying to jump his bill, was willing to pay for his room then and there, and he did.

"He did all this with sufficient self-possession to arouse no suspicions. He took a taxi to the

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other hotel, took the elevator upstairs, and knocked on Boston Bumbo's door. Bumbo probably grabbed the bag, set it on a chair, and leaned over to open it. He trusted Tiefenbrunnen, so Tiefenbrunnen merely walked up behind him, took out the gun, and shot him in the back of the head. Then Tiefenbrunnen waited a minute or two, chiefly because he was shaking too violently to leave. He took no particular precautions. He merely waited until he'd calmed down sufficiently to leave, then transferred the forty thousand to his own bag, picked it up, and walked out with it. The rest of the story you've heard."

"And the money?" the Inspector said. "What happened to it?"

The doctor shrugged. "I asked him and he gave me a silly little grin and said there was nothing left."

"The stupid, cockeyed, brainless, inept little runt!" the Inspector roared, fuming. "So lucky that nobody even heard the shot. Maybe the water was running in a couple of nearby rooms, maybe the elevator was rumbling, maybe there was a drunk making a racket out in the hall. You'd think that every time a gun was fired, somebody would hear it and report it, but you're wrong. Statistically, you can fire a gun on the main street of any American city and fifty percent of the people there won't even notice. So the little punk got away with it, and then a smart lawyer got him off."

"Thanks," I said drily, "but I didn't free him—the jury did."

The Inspector growled at me. "I said you were smart," he said. "Maybe *you* can tell us where the money is."

"Where it *was*," I said quietly. "But first, I'd like to try to explain Tiefenbrunnen, who was born to a Teutonic agglomeration of syllables that nobody could spell or pronounce easily, which is one of the reasons why he used the name of Wells. And as for the false addresses, look them up and you'll find they're famous streets of cities he'd never even been to. He'd read the names and thought they were romantic. Hollywood Boulevard. Royal Street in New Orleans. He was playing a role, pretending.

"Who was he? A pathetic little man with no friends and no family except an older sister who treated him like dirt. Once a year he came into an enchanted world where he stayed at a fine hotel and was entertained by his wealthy sister. For those few days he was no longer the tired clerk who lived in a cheap room on the second floor of a small brick house in Chicago. He was Mr. Oscar Wells, in search of adventure. He'd found it once, and in his fuzzy mind he was hoping

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that by taking somebody else's bag for the second time, a great adventure would come to him again. Specifically, he needed ten thousand dollars with which to keep the love and respect of his fellow man. Which is not normally purchasable, at any price."

"Don't give me all that sob stuff," the Inspector said. "He was a cheap little punk. He'd cut your throat from behind, and he'd smile at you while he put a bullet through your brain. He shot a man and got away with it, he gave me a bad time catching up with him, and I hope his soul rots."

The judge looked shocked, and I switched to my main point. "As I remarked earlier," I said, "my wife comes into the story. In fact, she's the heroine, chiefly because she can't resist an auction. She loves to go up to the country and pick up old and useless things, which then go into our attic. She'll buy anything old if she thinks it's a bargain.

"Let me make it clear that I'm not criticizing my wife. I love her, and I share her interest in her hobby. Whenever I can spare the time I go with her. We have a church pew in our attic that we bought for ten dollars, and we sit in it and hold hands and reminisce about all the useless things we've bought. Some of the pleasantest moments of my life have been spent in that attic, in the company of my wife.

"On one of her foraging trips a few months ago she brought back a full-length portrait in oil. She showed it to me with pride. She'd only paid three dollars for it, and the frame alone was worth ten times that. Not that we'd sell it. There was a place in our attic where the picture would fit perfectly.

"She'd bought it at an orphan asylum that had closed up for lack of funds. It was an old-fashioned institution, moldering with age. The building itself dated back to the Nineteenth Century, the ideas on which the place was run were probably equally antiquated, and the staff wasn't much younger. But the institution had survived until recently because it had a benefactor. The portrait, made from a photograph, was on the grand scale. The plaque underneath it read simply, *Our Benefactor*. The man in the portrait was Tiefenbrunnen.

"I drove up there the next day and located the former head of the defunct institution, and I asked him about their benefactor. The director, whose name is Foster, was lavish in his praise.

" 'We don't even know his name,' Foster said. 'He's a small kindly man, and he walked in here five years ago and said he'd been driving by and had noticed the building, that it looked rather shabby, and did we need money.

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"'I almost embraced him. We were in financial straits, and under threat of eviction. I brought him into my office and explained. He said his hobby was doing good, anonymously, and that it would be a privilege to help us. He handed me ten thousand dollars in cash and promised to visit us annually and contribute the same amount.' Foster said the money had meant the difference between survival and ruin.

"For four years Tiefenbrunnen came to the asylum and presented the director with his contribution. Four years—forty thousand dollars. After that his money ran out and he then made the feeble attempt to steal a suitcase in the forlorn hope there was cash in it. I don't know what could have gone through his head. But until then, look at him.

"He wanted respect, and he got it at the institution. There he was regarded as a man of wealth and substance—more important, as Mr. Bountiful. On the occasion of his annual visit the school declared a holiday and he addressed the student body. Foster said the benefactor never talked about himself—he was too modest for that; but he spoke of the homely virtues and he advised the boys to work hard and obey the law. That, he said, was the way to acquire riches.

"I told Foster nothing, but I admit I had a funny feeling when he shook his head in regret and said, 'A very fine man. I wish there were more like him in this world'."

I cleared my throat and gazed at the four others. "I don't," I said.

NEXT MONTH...

special ALL-STAR issue

14 stories — 11 *NEW* — including

GERALD KERSH — *Mafia novelet*
NICOLAS FREELING — *Van der Valk*
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PATRICIA HIGHSMITH — *mystery*
JACOB HAY — *spy story*
BERKELY MATHER — *terror*

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A WINDOW FOR DEATH

by REX STOUT

(*continued from page 78*)

Wednesday morning, after having breakfast in the kitchen with Fritz, as usual, while Wolfe was having his up in his room, also as usual, I got started on the instructions. They were simple, but it proved to be not so simple to carry them out. The first and main item was to phone Dr. Buhl and arrange for him to be at the office at eleven o'clock, when Wolfe would come down from the plant rooms, and to bring Anne Goren with him.

To begin with, I didn't get hold of him until nearly noon. From nine o'clock until ten all I got was his answering service and the information that he was out making calls. I left word for him to ring me, but he didn't. From ten o'clock on I got his office nurse. She was courteous and sympathetic, in a subdued way, the first three times I phoned, but after that got a little brusque. The doctor, still out making the rounds, had been told of my request to be rung, and she couldn't help it if he had been too busy.

When he finally called I couldn't very well ask him to arrive with Miss Goren at eleven, since it was already a quarter to twelve, so I suggested three o'clock, and got a flat no. Neither three nor any other hour. He had told Wolfe all he had to tell about the death of Bertram Fyfe, but if Wolfe wished to speak with him on the phone he could spare two minutes. Consulted, Wolfe said no, not on the phone. Deadlock.

The upshot was that after lunch I got the car from the garage and drove the 40 miles, up the West Side Highway and out the Sawmill River Parkway, to Mount Kisco, and found that Buhl's office was in a big white house on a big green lawn. I had been told he would see me after his p.m. office hours, which were from two to four, but there were still five patients in the waiting room when I arrived, so I had a nice long visit with the usual crop of magazines before the nurse, who had been with him at least 60 years, passed me through.

Buhl, seated at a desk, looking tired but still distinguished, told me abruptly, "I have calls to make and I'm late. What is it now?"

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I can be abrupt too. "A question," I said, "raised by a relative of the deceased. Did someone substitute something else for the morphine? Mr. Wolfe doesn't want to pass it on to the cops without giving it a look himself, but if you would prefer—"

"Morphine? You mean the morphine administered to Bert?"

"Yes, sir. Since the question has been—"

"That damn fool. Paul, of course. It's absurd. Substituted when and by whom?"

"Not specified." I sat down, uninvited. "But Mr. Wolfe can't just skip it so he'd appreciate a little information. Did you give the morphine to the nurse yourself?"

From the look he gave me I expected to be told to go climb a tree, preferably one about ready to topple, but he changed his mind and decided to get it over with. "The morphine," he said, "came from a bottle in my case. I took two quarter-grain tablets from the bottle and gave them to the nurse and told her to give one to the patient as soon as the dinner guests had left and the other one an hour later if necessary. She has told me that the tablets were administered as directed. To suppose that something was substituted for them is fantastic."

"Yes, sir. Where did she keep them until the time came to administer them?"

"I don't know. She is a competent nurse and completely reliable. Do you want me to ask her?"

"No, thanks, I will. Could there be any question about your bottle of morphine? Could it have been tampered with?"

"Not possibly. No."

"Had you got a fresh supply recently—I mean, put a fresh supply in that bottle?"

"No. Not for two weeks at least. Longer, probably."

"Would you say there is any chance—say, one in a million—that you took the tablets from the wrong bottle?"

"No. Not one in a billion." His brows went up. "Isn't this a little superfluous? From what David told me yesterday I gathered that Paul's suspicions were directed at the man who came to New York with Bert—Mr. Arrow."

"Maybe so, but Mr. Wolfe is being thorough. He's a thorough man." I stood up. "Many thanks, Doctor. If you wonder why I drove clear up here just for this, Mr. Wolfe is also careful. He doesn't like to ask questions about an unexpected death on the phone."

I left him, went back out to the car, and rolled off. The route back to the parkway took me through the center of town and on a red brick building on a corner, a very fine location, I saw the sign: TUTTLE'S PHARMACY.

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That was as good a place as any for a phone, so I parked down the block and walked back to it. Inside, it was quite an establishment—up-to-date, well furnished, well-stocked, and busy, with half a dozen customers on stools at the fountain and three or four others scattered around. One of them, at a counter in the rear, was being waited on by the proprietor himself, Vincent Tuttle. I crossed to a phone booth, dialed the operator, asked for the number I knew best, and in a moment had Wolfe's voice in my ear.

"From a booth," I told him, "in Tuttle's pharmacy in Mount Kisco. Quoting Dr. Buhl, the idea of a switch on the morphine is absurd and fantastic. As for its source, he gave two quarter-grain tablets to the nurse from his private stock. Do I proceed?"

"No." It was a growl, as always when he was interrupted in the plant rooms. "Or rather, yes, but first some further inquiry in Mount Kisco. After you left I considered the question of the hot-water bags and I may have hit on the answer—or I may not. At any rate it's worth trying. See Mr. Paul Fyfe and ask him what happened to the ice cream. You will remember—"

"Yeah, he bought it at Schramm's to take back to Mount Kisco for a Sunday party, and took it to Bert's apartment and put it in the refrigerator. You say you want to know what happened to it?"

"I do. See him and ask him. If he accounts for it, check him thoroughly. If he doesn't, see if Mr. or Mrs. Tuttle can, and check them. If they can't, ask Miss Goren when you see her about the morphine. If she can't, find Mr. Arrow and ask him. I want to know what happened to that ice cream."

"You certainly do. Tell me why so I'll have some idea what I'm after."

"No. You are not without discretion, but there's no point in subjecting it to an unnecessary strain."

"You're absolutely right and I appreciate it deeply. Tuttle's right here, so shall I see him first?"

He said no, to see Paul first, and hung up. As I left the booth and the store and headed for the address of Paul's real-estate office, down the street a block, I was looking around inside my skull for a connection between Schramm's famous mango ice cream and the hot-water bags in Bert Fyfe's bed, but if it was there I couldn't find it. Which was just as well, if there really was one, because I hate to overwork my discretion.

I found Paul on the second floor of an old wooden building, above a grocery store. His office was one small room, with two

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desks and some scarred old chairs which had probably been allotted to him when the family split up the paternal estate. Seated at the smaller desk was a woman with a long thin neck and big ears, about twice Paul's age, who was perfectly safe even with him. Paul, at the other desk, didn't get up as I entered.

"You?" he said. "You got something?"

I looked at the woman who was fiddling with some papers. He told her she could go and she merely plunked a weight down on the papers, got up, and left. No amenities at all.

When the door had closed behind her I answered him. "I haven't got something, I'm just after something. Mr. Wolfe sent me up here to ask Dr. Buhl about the morphine and to ask you about the ice cream. The last we heard it was still in the refrigerator in your brother's apartment. What happened to it?"

"Well, for God's sake." He was staring at me, at least with his good eye. It was hard to tell what the one with the shiner was doing. "What the hell has that got to do with anything?"

"I don't know. With Mr. Wolfe I often don't know, but it's his car and tires and gas and he pays my salary, so I just humor him. It's the simplest and quickest way for you too, unless there's something about the ice cream you'd rather keep to yourself."

"There's not a damn thing about the ice cream."

"Then I won't have to bother to sit down. Did you bring it to Mount Kisco for the Sunday party you mentioned?"

"No. I didn't come back to Mount Kisco until Sunday night."

"But you were in New York again the next day, Monday, for the funeral—and to call on Miss Goren again. Did you get the ice cream then?"

"Look," he said, "we'll leave Miss Goren out of this."

"That's the spirit," I said warmly. "I'm all for gallantry. But what happened to the ice cream?"

"I don't know and don't give a damn."

"Did you see it or touch it at any time after you put it in the refrigerator Saturday afternoon?"

"I did not. And if you ask me this is a lot of hooey. I don't know where that fat slob Wolfe got his reputation, but if this is the way he carries on an investi—what's the big rush?"

I had got as far as the door. Turning as I opened it I said politely, "Nice to see you," and went.

Backtracking to Tuttle's pharmacy I found there had been a turnover of customers, but business was still humming. Tuttle's shiny dome loomed behind a showcase of cosmetics. Catching

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his eye I crossed over and told him I would like to have a couple of minutes when he was free, and then went to the fountain and ordered a glass of milk. It was nearly all down when he called to me and beckoned, and I emptied the glass and followed him to the rear, behind the partition. He leaned against a counter and said it was a surprise, seeing me up there.

"A couple of little errands," I told him. "To ask Dr. Buhl about the morphine and to ask you about the ice cream. I've already asked Paul Fyfe. You remember he bought some ice cream at Schramm's Saturday afternoon and took it to Bert's apartment and put it in the refrigerator, intending to take it home later."

Tuttle corrected me. "I remember he said he did. What about it?"

"Mr. Wolfe wants to know what became of it. Paul says he doesn't know. He says he never saw it again after he put it in the refrigerator. Did you?"

"I never saw it at all."

"I thought you might have. You and your wife stayed there Saturday night. Sunday morning your brother-in-law was there dead, but even so you must have eaten something. I thought you might have gone to the refrigerator for something for breakfast and you might have noticed the ice cream."

"We had breakfast sent up." Tuttle was frowning. "There was no equipment there for cooking. But now that I think of it I believe Paul mentioned the ice cream Saturday evening at the dinner table. He said something about my ice cream here not comparing with Schramm's and asked why I didn't carry it, and I told him Schramm's products were sold only at their own stores, and anyway it was too expensive. Then I believe my wife mentioned it on Sunday when she went to the refrigerator for some ice for drinks."

"Did you eat any of it Sunday? Or bring it home with you?"

"No. I said I never saw it. We stayed at the apartment until Monday and came home after the funeral."

"You don't know what became of it?"

"I do not. I suppose it's still there. Unless that man Arrow— why don't you ask him?"

"I will. But first, since I'm here, I guess I'll ask your wife. Is she around?"

"She's at home, up on Iron Hill Road. I can phone her and tell her you're coming or you can speak with her on the phone. But I fail to see what that ice cream has to do with the death of my brother-in-law. What's the connection?"

It seemed to me that that reaction was rather late, but it could

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have been that since he was only an in-law he didn't want to butt in. "Search me," I told him. "I just run errands. Why don't we get your wife on the phone and I may not have to bother her by going there?"

He turned to a phone on the counter, dialed a number, got it, told his wife I wanted to ask her something, and handed me the transmitter. Louise, not being an in-law, said at once that it was ridiculous to annoy them about something utterly irrelevant, but after a little give and take she told me what she knew, which was nothing. She had never seen the ice cream, though she had probably seen the package. Getting ice from the refrigerator Sunday afternoon she had noticed a large paper bag on the bottom shelf and on returning to the living room, had mentioned it to her husband and her brother David, who was there, saying that she thought it was Paul's ice cream and asking if they wanted some. They had declined, and she had not looked into the paper bag. She had no idea what had happened to it.

I thanked her, hung up, thanked her husband, and beat it.

Next stop 48th Street, Manhattan.

In view of the parking situation, or rather the nonparking situation, I have given up using the car for midtown errands, so I left the highway at 46th Street and drove to the garage. I could have phoned a progress report to Wolfe from there, but the house is just around the corner, and I went in person instead of phoning, and got a surprise.

In response to my ring it wasn't Fritz who unbolted the door for me, but Saul Panzer. Saul, with his big nose taking half the available area of his narrow little face, looks at first glance as if he might need help to add two and two. Actually he needs help for nothing whatever. He is not only the best of the four or five operatives Wolfe calls on as required, he's the best anywhere.

"So." I greeted him, "you got my job at last, huh? Please show me to the office."

"Got an appointment?" he demanded, closing the door. Then he followed me down the hall and in.

Wolfe, behind his desk, grunted at me. "Back so soon?"

"No, sir," I told him. "This is just a stopover after leaving the car at the garage. Do you want a report on Paul and Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle before I go on?"

"Yes. Verbatim, please."

With him verbatim means not only all the words but also all the actions and expressions, and I sat down and gave them to him. He is the best listener I know, usually with his elbow on

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the chair arm, his chin resting on his fist, and his eyes half closed.

When I had finished he sat a moment and then nodded. "Satisfactory. Proceed with the others. Since you won't need the car may Saul use it?"

That wasn't as chummy as it sounds. It had long been understood that the car was his one piece of property on which I had the say.

"For how long?" I inquired.

"Today, tonight, and possibly part of tomorrow."

I looked at my wrist and saw 6:55. "There's not much left of today. Okay. Do I ask for what?"

"Not at the moment. It may be to chase a wild goose. What about your dinner?"

"I don't know." I arose. "If I find the ice cream I can eat that." I headed for the door, turned there to suggest, "Saul can eat the goose," and left.

Flagging a taxi at Tenth Avenue and riding uptown and across 48th Street to the East Side, a part of the thousand-wheeled worm, I admitted that he must have a glimmer of something, since Saul's daily rate was now fifty bucks, quite a bite out of a measly grand; but I still couldn't tie up the ice cream and the hot-water bags. Of course he might be sending Saul on a different trail entirely, and as far as keeping it to himself was concerned I had long ago stopped letting that get on my nerves, so I just tabled it.

The number, on 48th between Lexington and Third, belonged to an old brick four-story that had been painted yellow. In the vestibule two names were squeezed on the little slip by the button next to the top—"Goren" and "Poletti." I pushed the button and when the clicks came, opened the door and entered, and went up two flights of narrow stairs, which were carpeted and clean for a change. Turning to the front on the landing I got a surprise. A door had opened, and standing on the sill was one named neither Goren nor Poletti. It was Johnny Arrow, squinting at me.

"Oh," he said. "I thought maybe it was that Paul Fyfe."

I advanced, "If it's convenient," I said, "I'd like to see Miss Goren."

"What about?"

He needed taking down a peg. "Really," I said. "Only yesterday you were bragging about taking her to dinner. Don't tell me you've already been promoted to watchdog. I want to ask her a question."

For a second I thought he was going to demand to know the question, and so did he, but he decided to chickle instead. He invited me in, ushered me through an arch into a living room that was well cluttered with the fe-

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ninine touch, disappeared, and in
ı minute was back.

"She's changing," he informed
ne. He sat. "I guess you called
ne about bragging." His drawl
vas friendly. "We just got back
rom the ball game a little while
igo and now we're going out for
ı feed. I was going to phone you
his morning."

"You mean phone Nero
Wolfe?"

"No, you. I was going to ask
'ou where you bought that suit
/ou had on last night. Now I'd
ike to ask you where you bought
he one you've got on now, but
guess that's a little personal."

I was sympathetic. Realizing
hat a guy who had spent five
/ears in the bush and who, in New
York, found himself suddenly
'aced with the problem of togging
ıp for a ladylove, was in a tough
spot, especially if he could scrape
ıp only ten million bucks, I gave
ıim the lowdown from socks to
hirts. We were on ornamental
'ests, pro and con, when Anne
Goren came floating in and at
ight of her I regretted the steer
had given him. I would have
)een perfectly willing to feed her
nyself if I hadn't been working.

"Sorry I made you wait," she
old me politely. "What is it?"
She didn't sit, and we were up.

"A couple of little points," I
aid. "I saw Dr. Buhl this after-
ıoon, and expected he would
)hone you, but since you were
out he couldn't. First about the
morphine he gave you Saturday
to be given to Bertram Fyfe. He
says he took two quarter-grain
tablets from a bottle he had and
gave them to you, with directions.
Is that correct?"

"Wait a minute, Anne." Arrow
was squinting at me. "What's the
idea of this?"

"No special idea." I met the
brown eyes through the squint.
"Mr. Wolfe needs the information
to clear this thing up, that's
all.—Do you object to giving it,
Miss Goren? I asked Dr. Buhl
where you kept the tablets until
the time came to administer them
and he told me to ask you."

"I put them in a saucer and
put the saucer on top of the
bureau in the patient's room. That
is standard procedure."

"Sure. Would you mind going
right through it? From the time
Dr. Buhl gave you the tablets?"

"He handed them to me just
before he left, and after he left
I went to the bureau and put
them in the saucer. The instruc-
tions were to give one as soon
as the guests had gone, and one
an hour later if it seemed
desirable, and that's what I did."
She was being cool and pro-
fessional. "At ten minutes past
eight I put one of the tablets
in my hypo syringe with one c.c.
of sterile water and injected it
in the patient's arm. An hour later
he was asleep but restless, and I

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did the same with the other tablet. That quieted him completely."

"Have you any reason to suspect that the tablets in the saucer had been changed by someone? That the ones you gave the patient were not the ones Dr. Buhl gave you?"

"Certainly not."

"Look here," Johnny Arrow drawled, "that's a kind of a nasty question. I guess that's enough."

I grinned at him. "You're too touchy. If the cops ever got started on this they'd hammer away at her for hours. Five people have admitted they were in the patient's room after Dr. Buhl left, including you, and the cops would go over that with her forward, backward, sideways, and up and down. I don't want to spoil her appetite for dinner, so I merely ask her if she saw anything suspicious. Or heard anything. You didn't, Miss Goren?"

"I did not."

"Then that's that. Now the other point. You may or may not know that Paul Fyfe brought some ice cream to the apartment and put it in the refrigerator. It was mentioned at the dinner table, but you weren't there. Do you know what happened to the ice cream?"

"No. This seems pretty silly. Ice cream?"

"I often seem silly. Just ignore it. Mr. Wolfe wants to know about the ice cream. You know nothing at all about it?"

"No. I never heard of it."

"Okay." I turned to Arrow. "This one is for you too. What do you know about the ice cream?"

"Nothing" He chuckled. "You can get as nasty as you want to with me after that squeeze you put on me last night, but don't try getting behind me. I'm going to keep you right in front."

"From the front I use something else. You remember Paul Fyfe mentioned the ice cream at the dinner table?"

"I guess I do. I had forgotten about it."

"But you never saw it or touched it?"

"No."

"Or heard anything about what happened to it?"

"No."

"Then I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. You'll be doing yourself one too, because it's the quickest way to get rid of me. Where are you going for dinner?"

"I've got a table reserved at Rusterman's."

He was certainly learning his way around, possibly with Anne's help. "That's fine," I said. "because it's only a block out of the way. I want you to take me to the Churchill Towers apartment and let me look in the refrigerator."

It was a good thing I had taken the trouble to brief him on tailors and haberdashers. But for that

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he would probably have refused, and I would have had to go and persuade Tim Evarts, the house dick, to oblige, and that would have cost both time and money. He did balk some, but Anne put in, saying it would take less time to humor me than to argue with me, and that settled it. It seemed likely that in the years to come Anne would do a lot of settling, and then and there I decided to let him have her. She permitted him to help her get a yellow embroidered stole across her bare shoulders and he got a black homburg from a table. On our way downstairs, and in the taxi we took to the Churchill, I could have coached him on black homburgs, when and where and with what, but with Anne present I thought it advisable to skip it.

The Churchill Towers apartment, on the thirty-second floor, had a foyer about the size of my bedroom, and the living room would have accommodated three billiard tables with plenty of elbow space. There was an inside hall between the living room and the bedrooms and at one end of the hall was a serving pantry, with an outside service entrance. Besides a long built-in stainless-steel counter the pantry had a large warmer cabinet, an even larger refrigerator, and a door to a refuse-disposal chute, but no cooking equipment. Arrow and Anne stood just inside the swinging door, touching elbows, as I went and opened the door of the refrigerator.

The freezing compartment at the top held six trays of ice cubes and nothing else. On the shelves below were a couple of dozen bottles—beer, club soda tonic—five bottles of champagne lying on their sides, a bowl of oranges, and a plate of grapes. There was no paper bag, big or little, and absolutely no sign of ice cream. I closed the door and opened the door of the warmer cabinet. It contained nothing. I opened the door of the disposal chute, stuck my head in, and got a smell, but not of ice cream.

I turned to the hooker and the hooked. "All right," I told them, "I give up. Many thanks. As I said, this was the quickest way to get rid of me. Enjoy your dinner." They made gangway for me, and I went on out.

When Wolfe had asked me what about dinner I had told him I didn't know, but I knew now. I could be home by 8:30, and that afternoon, preparing for one of Wolfe's favorite hot-weather meals, Fritz had been collecting eight baby lobsters, eight avocados, and a bushel of young leaf lettuce. When he had introduced to them the proper amounts of chives, onion, parsley, tomato paste, mayonnaise, salt, pepper, paprika, pimientos, and dry white wine, he would have

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Brazilian lobster salad as edited by Wolfe, and not even Wolfe could have it all stowed away by half-past eight.

He hadn't. I found him in the dining room, at table, starting on deep-dish blueberry pie smothered with whipped cream. There was no lobster salad in sight, but Fritz, who had let me in, soon entered with the big silver platter, and there was plenty left. Wolfe's ban on business during meals is not only for his own protection but other people's too, including me, so I could keep my mind where it belonged, on the proper ratio of the ingredients of a mouthful. Only after that had been attended to, and my share of the blueberry pie, and we had crossed the hall to the office where Fritz brought coffee, did he ask for a report. I gave it to him. When I had described the climax, the empty refrigerator—that is, empty of ice cream—I refilled our coffee cups.

"But," I said, "if you have simply got to know what happened to it, God knows why, there is still one slender hope. David wasn't on my list. I was going to phone from the Churchill to ask if you wanted me to try him, but I wanted some of that lobster. He was there in the apartment most of Sunday. Shall I see him?"

Wolfe grunted. "I phoned him this afternoon and he was here at six o'clock. He says he knows nothing about it."

"Then that's the crop." I sa and took a sip of coffee. Fritz coffee is the best on earth. I've done it exactly as he does, but it's not the same. I took another sip. "So the gag didn't work."

"It is not a gag."

"Then what is it?"

"It is a window for death. I think it is—or was. I'll leave i at that for tonight. We'll see tomorrow. Archie."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't like the slant of your eye. If you're thinking of badger ing me, don't. Go somewhere."

"Glad to. I'll go have another piece of pie." I took my cup and saucer and headed for the kitchen

I spent the rest of the evenin there, chewing the rag with Fritz until his bedtime came, eleven o'clock, and then went to the of fice to lock the safe and tell Wolfe good night, and mounted the two flights to my room. I have been known to feel fairly well satisfied with myself as I got ready for bed after a day's work, but no that night. I had failed to learn the fate of the ice cream. I hadn't the faintest notion where the ice cream came in. I didn't know what a window for death was though I knew what it had been on a winter night twenty years ago. One of the noblest functions of a man is to keep millionaires from copping pretty girls, and I hadn't moved a finger to stop Arrow.

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And the case was no damn good anyhow, with a slim chance of getting any more out of it than the thousand bucks, and with the job limited to deciding whether to call the cops in or not. It was a bad setup all the way. Usually I'm asleep ten seconds after I hit the pillow, but that night I tossed and turned for a full minute before I went off.

The trouble with mornings is that they come when you're not awake. It's all a blur until I am washed and dressed and have somehow made my way down to the kitchen and got orange juice in me; and I'm not really awake until the fourth griddle cake and the second cup of coffee. But that Thursday morning it was accelerated. As I picked up the glass of orange juice I became aware through the blur that Fritz was putting stuff on a tray, and glanced at my wrist.

"My God," I said, "you're late. It's a quarter past eight."

"Oh," he said, "Mr. Wolfe already has his. This is for Saul. He's up with Mr. Wolfe. He said he already had breakfast, but you know how he likes my summer sausage."

"When did he come?"

"About eight o'clock. Mr. Wolfe wants you to go up when you're through breakfast." He picked up the tray and went.

That did it. I was awake. But that was no good either, because it kept me from enjoying my breakfast. I ate the sausage all right, but forgot to taste it, and I also forgot to put honey on the last cake until it was half gone. I had *The Times* propped on the rack in front of me and pretended to read it, but didn't. It was only 8:32 when I took the last gulp of coffee, shoved my chair back, went to the hall and up one flight to Wolfe's room, found the door open, and entered.

Wolfe, in his yellow pajamas and barefoot, was seated at the table near a window, and Saul, chewing on griddle cake and sausage, was across from him. I approached.

"Good morning," I said coldly. "Shoeshine?"

"Archie," Wolfe said.

"Yes, sir. Suit pressed?"

"This is no time of day for you, I know, but I want to get on with this. Get all of them, including Dr. Buhl. Arrange for them to be here at eleven o'clock, or if that's impossible, at noon. Tell them I have made my decision and wish to communicate it. If Dr. Buhl is obstinate tell him that the decision, and my reasons for it, will be of considerable professional interest to him and that I feel strongly he should be present. If you phone him immediately you may get him before he starts his day's work. Get him first."

"Is that all?"

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"For the present, yes. I need a little more time with Saul." I left them.

It was twenty minutes to twelve when, after a buzz from me on the house phone to tell him they were all there, Wolfe entered, crossed to his desk, greeted them with a nod to the left and one to the right, and sat. On the phone Dr. Buhl and I, after a warm discussion, had settled for eleven thirty, but he was ten minutes late.

I had given David, as the senior member of the family, the red leather chair. Dr. Buhl and Paul and the Tuttles were ranged in front of Wolfe's desk, with Paul next to me. I wanted him handy in case Johnny Arrow got a notion to try another one-two on him. Arrow and Anne were in the rear, side by side, behind Dr. Buhl. Saul Panzer was over by the big globe, in one of the yellow chairs, with his feet, on their toes, pulled back. He always sits like that, even when we're playing pinochle.

Wolfe focused on David. "I was hired," he said, "to inquire into your brother's death and decide whether the police should be asked to investigate. I have decided in the affirmative. It is indeed a case for the police."

They made noises and exchanged glances. Paul turned his head to glare at Johnny Arrow. Louise Tuttle reached for her husband's arm. Dr. Buhl said with authority, "I challenge that decision. As attending physician I demand your reasons for it."

Wolfe nodded. "Of course Doctor. You are right to make that demand. Naturally the police will want my reasons too, as will the others here, and the simplest way to handle it is for me to dictate my memorandum to Inspector Cramer of the Homicide Squad in your presence." His eyes moved. "It will go better if none of you interrupt. If there are questions after I finish I'll answer them. Archie, your notebook, please. First a letter to Mr. Cramer."

I swiveled to get the notebook and pen, swiveled back, crossed my legs, and rested the notebook on my knee. That way I was facing the audience. "Shoot," I told him.

"Dear Mr. Cramer. I believe you should give your attention to the death of a man named Bertram Fyfe last Saturday night in his apartment at Churchill Towers. In support of that belief I enclose summaries of recent conversations with seven persons, with identifying data, and also a memorandum of the results of the inquiry I have made. Sincerely."

He wiggled a finger at me. "You will prepare the summaries and data, and the memorandum will tell you what should be included and what may be omit-

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ted. Start the memorandum on my letterhead, in the usual form. Understood?"

"Right."

He leaned back and took a breath. "The memorandum: Since three of the persons involved, including the deceased, are named Fyfe, I shall use first names. Paul's conjecture regarding the morphine can, I think, be ignored. To suppose that one of those present brought with him lethal tablets of some sort, so similar in appearance to the morphine tablets that they could be substituted without arousing the suspicion of the nurse, would be extravagant indeed. One person, Tuttle, the pharmacist, might have had such tablets or been able to get them or make them, but even so it would have to be assumed that he anticipated an opportunity to substitute them unobserved, also an extravagant assumption."

"It's ridiculous," Dr. Buhl declared. "Any lethal substance in the Pharmacopoeia would have left evidence that I would have detected."

"I doubt that, Doctor. It's an overstatement and I wouldn't advice you to repeat it on the witness stand. I asked you not to interrupt. Archie?"

He wanted the last three words, and I obliged. " 'An extravagant assumption.' "

"Yes. Therefore, after routine inquiry by Mr. Goodwin I dismissed jugglery with the morphine as a mere chimera of Paul's spiteful fancy; and indeed I would have dismissed the whole matter on that basis but for one pesky thorn, the hot-water bags. Paragraph.

"I felt compelled to assume, and I am confident you would have agreed in the circumstances, that Paul had found the hot-water bags empty in the bed. That stumped me. After the departure of the nurse, sometime during the night, someone had taken the bags from the bed, emptied them, and put them back. For what conceivable reason? That could not be simply dismissed. I worried it. I sent Mr. Goodwin to Mount Kisco to inquire about the morphine, but that was mere routine. The empty hot-water bags had somehow to be explained.

"I considered them in every possible light, in relation to everything I had been told by all those concerned, and it came to me from two directions at once. The first was as a possible answer to the question—what purpose could empty bags serve in a bed better than full bags? The second was the fact that the Fyfes' father had also died of pneumonia, after someone had opened a window and let the winter cold in to him. A window for death. The question and the fact together brought me an idea. Paragraph.

"I made three phone calls—no,

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four. I phoned the manager of Schramm's store on Madison Avenue and asked him how he packs two quarts of ice cream on a hot summer afternoon for a customer who wishes to take it some distance in a car. He said the ice cream is put in a cardboard container, and the container is put in a carton on a bed of dry ice, and chunks of dry ice are packed on both sides of it and on top. He said that is their invariable custom. I phoned Dr. Vollmer, who lives on this street, and at his suggestion I phoned an official of a firm which makes dry ice, and learned (a) that several pounds of chunks of dry ice placed under the covering of a pneumonia patient near his chest would certainly lower his temperature materially and probably dangerously; (b) that only a controlled experiment could tell how dangerously, but it might be fatal; (c) that if the dry ice pressed against the body, even with fabric between, it would burn the skin seriously and leave vivid marks; and (d) that a rubber bag would be perfect, between the ice and the body, for prevention of the burning. My fourth—"

"This is fantastic," Dr. Buhl said. "Perfectly fantastic."

"I agree," Wolfe told him. "I had something fantastic to account for. Paragraph My fourth phone call was to David Fyfe, to ask him to come to see me. The next thing was to learn what had happened to the ice cream. The hypothesis I was forming was bootless if there was evidence that the package had been intact on Sunday, and when Mr. Goodwin phoned from Mount Kisco I asked him to inquire. He did so, of Paul, Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle, Miss Goren, and Mr. Arrow, and they all disclaimed any knowledge of it. He also—"

Louise Tuttle's high thin voice cut in. "That's not true! I told him I saw it in the refrigerator Sunday!"

Wolfe shook his head. "You told him you saw a large paper bag and supposed it contained the ice cream. You didn't look inside the bag. You didn't see the dry ice." His eyes were holding hers. "Did you?"

"Don't answer that," Tuttle said abruptly.

"Indeed." Wolfe's brows went up. "Have we reached a point where questions can't be answered? Did you look inside the bag, Mrs. Tuttle?"

"No, I didn't!"

"Then I'll proceed. Archie?"

I cued him. "'it. He also.'"

"Yes. He also went to the apartment and looked in the refrigerator and there was no sign of the ice cream. I had myself asked David, and he too had said he knew nothing about it. So my hypothesis now had some flesh and bone. Someone had done

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something with the ice cream and was lying about it. If the dry ice had been used in the manner suggested, to kill a pneumonia patient, it could never be proven, since dry ice leaves no trace whatever, and my assumption would have to remain an assumption. I had to tackle the problem from another direction, and in fact I had already prepared to do so by asking certain questions of David Fyfe and by sending for Saul Panzer. You know Saul Panzer. Paragraph.

"There had been a few intimations, as you will find in the enclosed summaries of conversations. Bert Fyfe had been tried for the murder of his father and acquitted. He had resented the testimony of his sister and brothers at the trial, and a major item in his defense was an alibi supplied by his friend Vincent Tuttle, who testified that they had been playing cards at the rooming house where they both had rooms. According to Mr. Arrow, Bert had come to New York not on business but, in Arrow's words, because something was eating him from away back. Arrow himself was of course not a target for suspicion, since he spent Saturday night in a police station.

"And other points you will not miss—the most suggestive being, I think, that Bert not only went to see the landlady he had rented a room from twenty years ago, but when he found she had gone to Poughkeepsie he went there to see her. As you will find from the summary of my conversation with David yesterday afternoon—I'll have to give you that, Archie—Bert had lived in her rooming house only a short time, about two months, hardly a sufficient period to form a bond so strong that after an absence of twenty years he would seek her out so persistently. It was a fair inference that he had some special purpose in mind. Paragraph.

"Other suggestive bits came from David yesterday afternoon in response to questions. His father's relations with his progeny, after the mother's death, had not been cordial. He had ordered Bert to leave and not return. He had been difficult with David and Paul. He had refused permission for his daughter to marry the young man named Vincent Tuttle, then a clerk in the local drug store, and had commanded her not to see him. After his death Louise had married Tuttle and later they had bought the drug store with her share of the inheritance. I had known, of course, from a previous conversation, that the estate had been divided equally among the children."

Wolfe turned his head. "Before I go on, Mr. Tuttle, you might like to answer a question or two. Is it true that in your hearing, the day before he was taken ill,

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Bert mentioned the fact that he had seen Mrs. Dobbs, his and your former landlady, and talked with her?"

Tuttle passed his tongue over his lips. "I don't think so," he rumbled. He cleared his throat. "Not that I remember."

"Of course he did, Vince," David declared. He looked at Wolfe. "I told you yesterday."

"I know. I'm testing his memory." He went to Paul. "Do you remember it?"

"Yes," Paul's eyes were on Tuttle. "You're damn right I remember it. He said he was going to see her again as soon as he got well."

Wolfe grunted. "I won't ask you, Mrs. Tuttle." He focused on her husband again. "The other question. Where were you yesterday evening from six to ten?"

It floored him. "Yesterday evening?" he asked lamely.

"Yes. From six to ten. To refresh your memory, Mr. Goodwin came to your store to ask you and your wife about the ice cream and left around five thirty."

"There's nothing wrong with my memory," Tuttle asserted. "But I don't have to account to you for my actions."

"Then you decline to answer?"

"You have no right to ask. It's none of your business."

"Very well. I merely thought you had a right to tell me. Archie?"

Since it had been a long interruption I gave him more than three words. I looked at my notebook. " 'That the estate had been divided equally among the children.' "

Wolfe nodded. "Paragraph. As you will see in the summary of my conversation with Mr. Arrow he had told me that Bert had told his relatives that he had gone to see his former landlady; and David verified that yesterday evening and gave me the landlady's name—Mrs. Robert Dobbs. That has just been corroborated by Paul, as I dictate this. Clearly it was desirable to learn what Bert had wanted of Mrs. Dobbs, and since Mr. Goodwin might be needed for other errands I phoned Saul Panzer and sent him to Poughkeepsie. David hadn't known her address, and it took Mr. Panzer a while to locate her.

"It was nearly ten o'clock when he got to the house where she lives with her married daughter. As he approached the door it opened and a man emerged, and as they met, the man stopped him and asked whom he wanted to see. As you know, Mr. Panzer is highly sensitized and extremely discreet. He replied that he was calling on Jim Heaton, having learned the name of Mrs. Dobbs's son-in-law during his inquiries, and the man went on his way. Reporting to me later, Mr. Panzer

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described him and the description fitted Vincent Tuttle. They are both in my office now and Mr. Panzer identifies Mr. Tuttle as the man he saw emerging from that house last night."

Wolfe turned. "Saul?"

"Yes, sir. Positive."

"Mr. Tuttle, do you wish to comment?"

"No."

"That is wise, I think." He returned to me. "Paragraph. Before dictating the preceding paragraph I asked Mr. Tuttle where he was last evening and he refused to tell me. I am also enclosing a summary of Mr. Panzer's conversation with Mrs. Dobbs. I must confess it is far from conclusive. She would not identify the man who had just left the house. She would not divulge the purpose of Bert Fyfe's visit to her. She would not discuss in any detail the events on that winter night twenty years ago.

"There are, of course, obvious conjectures. Was the alibi which Tuttle gave Bert a fraud, and Bert didn't dare to impeach it? Does Mrs. Dobbs know it was a fraud? Did Tuttle leave the rooming house that stormy night, but Bert didn't, and Mrs. Dobbs knows it? Did Tuttle go to the Fyfe home, get admitted by Louise, drug her chocolate drink, and later return and open the windows from the outside? I do not charge him with those acts, but the questions put themselves. I was not hired to find evidence to convict a murderer, but merely to decide whether a police investigation is called for, and I think it is, for the reasons given. I telephoned you this morning to suggest that you ask the Poughkeepsie police to put a guard on Mrs. Dobbs and the house she lives in, and said I would shortly tell you why. I have now told you. Paragraph.

"Many questions also put themselves regarding the death of Bert Fyfe. Merely as one example, if it is to be assumed that Vincent Tuttle, fearing exposure of a former crime, again undertook to help pneumonia kill a man, this time using dry ice instead of an open window, why did he leave the paper bag in the refrigerator that night, presumably with the ice cream still in it? Perhaps he didn't know there was a disposal chute in the pantry; and when, on Sunday afternoon, he found there was one he took the first opportunity to dump the thing.

"As for the dry ice it leaves no trace, so there is no record for you, but experts can furnish you with presumptions, as they did me. The chunks of ice were of course not put inside the bags; the limp empty bags were merely used as insulation to keep the ice from contact with the body. Probably the experts can tell you how long it would take small chunks of dry ice to wholly

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vaporize, but that point is not vital, since Mr. Tuttle was there in the apartment and could easily have had opportunity to remove the residue, if any, before Paul discovered the body. That, and other pertinent questions, I leave to you. I have done the job I was hired for and I trust you will not find it necessary to consult me at any length.

Wolfe flattened his palms on the chair arms and took in the audience. "There it is," he said. "I didn't want to tell you about it and go all over it again for Mr. Cramer. Any questions?"

David was slumped in the red leather chair, his head down, staring at the floor. At Wolfe's question he slowly lifted his head and slowly moved it, taking in the others, one by one. He then squeezed words out.

"I suppose I ought to feel sorry, but I don't. I always thought Bert killed his father. I always thought Vince's alibi was false, that he lied to save Bert, but I see it now. Without it Bert would probably have been convicted, so it did save him, but it saved Vince too. Of course Bert knew it was false, he knew he and Vince hadn't been together all evening, but if he said so, if he said Vince had gone out for a while, that would have destroyed his own alibi, and he didn't dare—and he didn't know Vince had killed our father. He might have suspected, but he didn't know. I see it now. I even see the Mrs. Dobb's part." He frowned. "I'm trying to remember her testimony. She said she hadn't heard either of them go out, but probably she had, and she might have known which one; but if she said she heard either of them leave the house that would have ruined Bert's alibi, and she was crazy about Bert and she hadn't liked our father."

He thought he was going to say more, decided not to, rose from the chair, and turned to his brother. "Was this what you were after, Paul? Did you suspect this?"

"Hell, no," Paul said harshly. "You know damn well what I suspected, and who, and if this fat slob is right about the dry ice"—he bounced out of his chair and wheeled to face Johnny Arrow—"why couldn't it have been him? He had a key to the apartment! I never said I knew how he did it. And—now lay off!"

David had stepped across and grabbed his arm and for a second I thought Paul was going to sock his elder brother, but evidently David knew him better than I did. David said nothing, but he didn't have to. He merely hung onto his arm, steered him around back of the other chairs, and headed him toward the hall. They disappeared and Saul went to let them out.

"I have no questions," Dr. Buhl said. He arose and looked down

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at the Tuttles, then at Wolfe. "My God, after twenty years, You used a phrase, 'a window for death.' You have certainly opened one." He looked down again. "Louise, you have been my patient nearly all your life. Are you all right?"

"I'm all right." Her high thin voice was trying not to be a wail. "I don't believe it."

Buhl opened his mouth to say more, decided not to, and went. Wolfe spoke to the man and wife who owned a fine drug store. "If you have no questions you might as well go."

Louise, with her teeth bearing down on her lip, tugged at her husband's sleeve. He took a deep breath, put a hand on her shoulder, and raised himself from the chair, and she came up with him. Side by side they headed for the door and I left them to Saul too. When they were out of sight Wolfe sent his eyes in the direction of the pair in the rear and said sharply, "Well? Have I fixed it up for you?"

Damned if they weren't holding hands, and they continued to hold as they got up and approached the desk. I am perfectly capable of holding hands, but not in public. Anne looked as if she wanted to cry but didn't intend to. Luckily it was Johnny's left hand she had, for he wanted to use the other one. When they got to the desk he stretched his arm across it and said, "Shake."

I should explain one thing. Since Johnny and Anne had no part in the performance why did Wolfe tell me to invite them? I didn't have to ask him. I know him. One little grand is a pretty skimpy fee for a job like that, spotting a murderer, and if Johnny Arrow came and saw the neat process by which the guy who had killed his partner was dug out he might feel inclined to show his appreciation by contributing a small hunk of uranium. That was the idea, no question about it, and for some weeks, as I flipped through the morning mail, I had my eye out for an envelope with his return address.

It never came and I quit expecting it.

But last week, just four days after a jury had convicted Vincent Tuttle of the first-degree murder of Bertram Fyfe's father—it had been decided to try him for that one because it was a tighter case, especially after Mrs. Dobbs opened up—here came an envelope with Fyfe-Arrow Mining Corporation, Montreal, in the corner, and when I opened it and saw the amount of the check I raised my brows as high as they would go.

A really nice hunk.

There was no letter, but that was understandable. He had no time for writing letters. He was much too busy showing his wife how to prospect.

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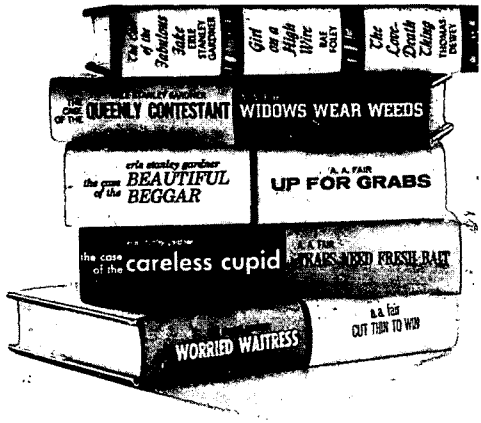
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